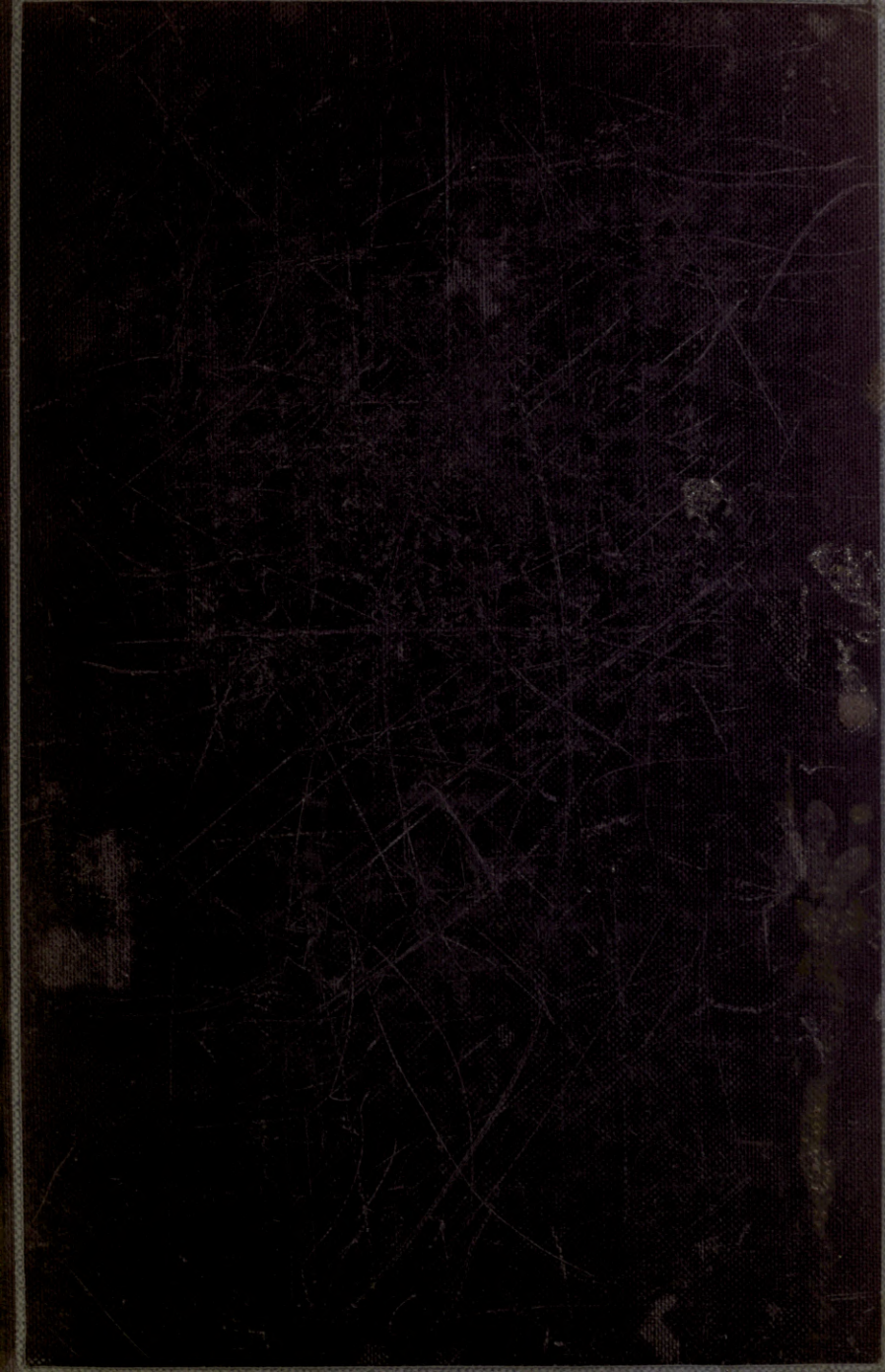




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THE "MOTH" MURDER

BY

LYNTON BLOW



NEW YORK

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

AUTHORIZED EDITION

PRINTED IN THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To
MY FRIEND
R. VASSALL-ADAMS

2134526

AUTHOR'S NOTE

All the characters in this volume are purely fictitious.

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THE "MOTH" MURDER

I

THE CRASH

WILLIAM POPE, coastguard, set down his mug on the table, drew his coat-sleeve across his mouth, then pushed away his used plate. Delving into his pocket, he withdrew, first his tobacco pouch and pipe, and then a copy of the evening paper. Carefully loading and lighting the pipe, he began, after settling well back into the depths of his not altogether uncomfortable chair, to glance over the card of the next day's race meeting.

It was a lonely job this, watching night after night for distress signals that seldom went up; and for smugglers who never seemed to smuggle, at any rate not around this part of the coast.

After a lightning survey of the whole programme he decided to have another look around before going more carefully in the matter of picking the winner of the 3.10, the Big Race of the day.

He had soon seen that this was going to be a much harder task than he had at first anticipated—seventeen runners, and half of them had not been seen out this season; an hour's work at the very least before he could, from out of the chaos of Weights, Jockeys, Distances, Form, and Latest London Betting, restore order and find the "Certainty" the Handicapper and Press Correspondents had overlooked.

So, stretching himself, he rose, and went to the door and out on to the short, tufted grass that covers the headland.

Had it been daytime instead of 2 A.M., he would, on opening the door, have been confronted by the tall, white cliffs of the Isle of Wight, with a view of the Solent, while nearer, just across Totland Bay, The Needles, standing gaunt and detached from the mainland, like sentinels guarding the narrow channel.

A treacherous part of the coast, this, as all mariners know, for, hidden by the waves, but still only just below the surface, wait cruel, jagged rocks, eager for the ship that deviates but slightly from her course.

However, as the moon, though full, was hidden at that moment by heavy rain-clouds, all he could see that night, or rather early morning, was the glow from the lighthouse snuggled at the base of The Needles, and the more powerful shaft of light from the station at St. Catherine's Point, flashing intermittently across the placid waters of Bournemouth Bay.

Moving to the front of his hut, he could see, somewhat to his right, a solitary pin-prick of light from somewhere on the Swanage shore—and the glittering portholes of a liner far out in the English Channel. All was well at sea, it seemed, so he moved on his little circuit.

Again, from the right-hand side of his little outpost, he could see but a few scattered lights from Bournemouth, and the beam from the headlamps of

a car far away on what he took to be the main London-Bournemouth road.

From the back of his hut, across the broad expanse of Christchurch Harbour, he could just make out the ancient Priory, caught by a faint beam of moonlight that broke through the now receding clouds.

Feeling satisfied that all was well, after calling to his dog Spot, who was busily engaged in scratching at some rabbits' holes, he turned, to re-enter his little station, there to settle in brighter surroundings the question of which horse should carry his money in the 3.10 at Newmarket.

Withdrawing an envelope from an inner pocket and producing a pencil from behind his ear, he set about to consider the question in what he thought to be the most scientific manner.

"'Golden Glory,'" he wrote, "'Jockey, J. Ross. 4 yrs. 9 st. 2 lb. Rand 2nd to Rendezvous, Hurst Park. August 8th. . . . Not been out this season.' I remember that race," he ruminated. "Let me down then, the blighter. Well, Rendezvous's not in the 3.10, anyhow, that's one good point."

He pondered over Golden Glory's chances awhile.

"I dunno!" he muttered at length. "I don't altogether fancy it, once bitten, twice shy.

"Let's see"—drawing his finger down the list of runners. "Scarecrow—don't know it, don't like it's name either.

"Sweet Olive, Starlight 4th, Eagle's Claw, Jimmy—so Jimmy's running again, is he? I thought his career was ended last season . . . sprained tendon, I thought. Must be wrong, I expect!

"Let's see now. Rose of Lincoln, Income Tax, Mistake. Good! Here's another old favourite—Zadwig.

"Never shall forget when he won the Leger, five shillings each way I 'ad on 'im. An' didn't we have a night out? Not 'arf! Tight as lords, the whole gang on us!"

He grimaced at the recollection of his reception home that evening. It was decidedly chilly, to say the very least of it.

"Well, that was holiday-time," he said aloud, as if an explanation was desirable. "That was diff'rent. No time for drinkin' now. All up with your job if they caught you squiffy on this beat. Quite right too. Work when you works an' drink when you play. That's what I holds with!

"Now where was I? Oh, yes! Zadwig, wasn't it? That's right. Now let's see. . . . Jockey, L. Coombs. . . . Bright lad, that Coombs. Been out of luck lately, though."

Old Pope worked on, while time flew by as on wings.

Then, from out of the silence of the night came a sound, indistinct at first, but rapidly getting louder, clearer-defined, and nearer.

"What's that, I wonder?" muttered old Pope. "Sounds like an aeroplane!"

Dropping the paper, he rose hurriedly and pulled open the door. Still louder now, and almost overhead!

Looking up, Pope saw it at once—a small white monoplane, showing port and starboard lights, fly-

ing very fast and rather low; right across the pale, luminous face of the moon.

"That's young Dennis Evans," he said aloud. "Silly young fool. What the 'ell's he doing up there at this time of night? He's got all day to play about in, but that's not enough for the likes of him. All the same, these young chaps," he grumbled, "must turn night into day.

"Well, I suppose it's no concern of mine—but I'd rather it be him than me—flyin' out to sea all alone!"

With a last glance at the fast receding lights of the 'plane, the old fellow went back to his chair—and the 3.10.

The sound had almost faded by now.

Picking up the paper again, he started to consider anew the chances of Redskin in the "Big 'Un."

"8 st. 7 lb. . . . Favourably weighted," he thought. "A furlong more than he's used to, though; I wonder if that will be his undoing? Oh! Crane up. An old hand. Hasn't had too good a season—perhaps this is where he is going to break his run of bad luck. Hello! What's that? Could swear my lamp flickered.

"No! It's steady enough. Funny, though.

"There it is again.

"No! It's outside . . . a distress rocket, it looks like!"

Paper in hand, he rushed to the door, flung it open, and stepped out into the night.

Looking up, he saw at once the cause of his anxiety.

A huge ball of fire seemed to be coming across the harbour towards him.

It was an aeroplane—in flames!

"Good God! Young Evans!" he gasped. "He must have circled!"

Nearer now, almost overhead.

The engine spluttered—then stopped.

Instantly the 'plane banked over and began a dizzy, mad, uncontrollable plunge earthwards.

As it dived, great blobs of fire fell from it, and on each twist and spin the flames blazed up the fiercer, for the leaking tanks sprayed more and more petrol out over the whole.

It was still up 1,500 to 2,000 feet when Pope first noticed the disaster, and it fell this distance at an almost incredible speed, leaving a trail of black fumes behind to catch and reflect the brilliance of the flames.

Then, with a resounding crash—almost enough to split the ear-drums—it hit the ground, throwing out a ring of blazing petrol over the grass for twenty yards or more around, and shooting a cascade of sparks high into the air.

For several moments Pope stood petrified, awed by the intensity of the flames.

Then, pulling himself together, he ran the two hundred yards or so to the 'plane.

But he could do nothing. He felt the hot air on his face when a good hundred yards away, and the nearest he could approach to it was barely another fifty.

For a while the wreckage burned with redoubled fury as one of the tanks burst with a devastating roar. Then they settled down to eat themselves out in a little less terrifying manner.

Pope had realised from the first that little he could do would prove of the slightest use. If Evans was in the 'plane, his body must have been burned to a cinder long ago.

However, it was his duty to summon aid as soon as possible, so he retraced his footsteps back to his hut and speedily got into communication by 'phone with Bournemouth police station.

The Superintendent himself happened to be in the office at the time and the call was immediately switched through to him.

"What's this?" he said. "Coastguard Station. Hengistbury Head. 'Plane down in flames. Yes, I've got it all right—I'll let the fire brigade know and we'll be along at once!"

Pope replaced the receiver and went back again to the scene of the crash.

Although the heat was not quite so terrific now, he could get no nearer than before, as the grass, due to the scorching to which it had been subjected, had become ignited and was giving off choking, acrid fumes and banks of heavy smoke which absolutely defied penetration.

After a few more moments spent gazing towards the half-hidden wreckage, Pope turned to go part of the way to meet the Superintendent.

At that moment, however, another figure appeared coming hurriedly towards him from out of the pall.

For a few moments he thought it might be Dennis Evans. "Has he been lucky enough to escape by parachute?" he wondered.

But it was only the tenant of a near-by farm

who had been awakened by the crash and immediately set out to render what aid he could.

Within another ten minutes the two were joined by a sergeant and a constable from Christchurch, who had seen the reflection of the blaze in the sky and hurried over by motor-boat to investigate.

"A sad business, Pope, I fear," said the sergeant as he drew near. "Not a dog's chance to get out of there."

"No," agreed the coastguard. "Unless he has managed to escape by parachute."

"I don't think so," pointed out the farmer. "He's had ample time to get along here by now. No! I'm afraid we shall find all that's left of him in there"—indicating the debris.

"If he jumped, there's still a chance that he has been carried out over the cliff edge by the wind, isn't there?" inquired Pope, still sticking to his parachute theory, "—or even fallen short and landed in the harbour. Perhaps he's marooned on one of those mud-flats."

"Possibly," acceded the sergeant. "Let's hope so. Anywhere rather than helpless in those flames," he added with a shudder.

"Ah! Here comes Superintendent Walker with the fire extinguishers." Old Pope's sharp eyes had caught and recognised the approaching figures long before the others were aware of them. "Now we shall soon know one way or the other."

The Superintendent drew close, panting hard, followed by a little army of firemen.

"Couldn't get the engine along here," he gasped. "Hell of a place to get out to, this!"

"Never mind, sir," said the Christchurch sergeant. "It would be too late now even if you had it—the grass is mostly out and the chemicals are the only things that will have any effect on the wreckage."

"I suppose so," agreed the Superintendent, looking at the debris. "No idea who it is, have you, sergeant?" he asked.

"Yes! As a matter of fact, Pope recognised the 'plane. It has been over here once before to-night. Says it's young Evans from Bournemouth, and this," pointing to the twisted metal work, "his little white monoplane."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the Superintendent. "Are you positive? Why, only last week he tried to persuade me to go up with him for a short trip," he continued sadly, "and now—this!"

While the two stood talking, the captain of the fire brigade and his men had hurriedly donned their respirators, and now, armed with the extinguishers, they advanced towards the flames. In spite of their most strenuous efforts, however, it was a full half-hour before they could quell the fire enough to allow the others to approach.

The sergeant was the first to draw close, and, after one look at the debris, he withdrew. "I don't know much about flying," he said, "but I'm *positive*—whatever Pope says to the contrary—that's not the wreckage of a monoplane—and I'm pretty certain it's a 'Moth.'"

"Then there must have been two of them," began Pope excitedly, "and if it's not the single-winged 'plane lying here, young Evans is safe. Thank goodness for that, for although I don't altogether

hold with some of his ways, I can't say as I've ever met a nicer fellow. No snobbery about him—and rich too."

"You're right there," seconded the sergeant. "A rattlin' good sort I've always found him myself."

"Then if it isn't Evans, who is it?" asked the Superintendent.

"Perhaps it's an army 'plane," suggested Pope. "They do a lot of night flying over these parts, you know. Come from an aerodrome out Winchester way, so I'm told."

"That's an idea anyhow," said the Superintendent. "Get on the 'phone to them and find out if they're flying to-night."

They repaired to the office, and within a very few minutes Pope had obtained the information they sought.

No army 'planes were up in the district that night.

"I thought not," said the sergeant. "That's a private 'Moth' 'plane."

"I wonder if we ought to ring up Sir Charles Stafford's place out Lymington way?" the Superintendent asked. "He has a 'Moth,' I know."

"I'll try if you like, sir," replied the coastguard. "Perhaps I can find out from the butler without disturbing Sir Charles."

"Righto! Have a go at it. Even if we do fetch him from his bed, the information will be worth it. I say, sergeant, the flames are almost out now—let's go and see if they've found anything."

The two men left the hut and walked over to the scene of the disaster once more.

The brigade captain came part of the way to meet them.

"It's a dreadful sight, Superintendent," he began. "We can see the remains of a body at the bottom of the wreckage, but the fuselage is still much too hot to let us drag it clear!"

It was indeed a dreadful sight; the little group could see it all too well.

And as they stood there, helpless, waiting for the glowing metal to cool, old Pope came running up.

"I believe you're right, Superintendent," he shouted. "A 'Moth' left Lymington at three o'clock this morning bound for Plymouth. Sir Charles himself was piloting it, with Mrs. Evans as his passenger! The Head would be directly on their route!"

II

MURDER!

INSPECTOR HUNT, of the Criminal Investigation Department, New Scotland Yard, had spent an exceedingly restless night.

After a fast run down in his car to Princetown Prison, where he had hoped to obtain an important statement from a convict, he had, instead of continuing his journey back to Town that night, returned by the lower route, breaking his drive at Bournemouth to pay a long overdue visit to his married sister who resided in the Southbourne district.

Although he had retired to bed that night feeling dog-tired, he had, to his annoyance, only remained asleep for what seemed the space of a few minutes before he had awakened rather suddenly and apparently without cause.

Once awake, he had found it impossible to get off to sleep again, as on each occasion that he managed to settle comfortably he was disturbed by the sound of a vehicle bumping and rattling over the unfinished road a few feet beneath his window.

At last he could stand it no longer. It was just getting light outside, so he decided to dress and go for an early stroll.

Silently completing his toilet, he crept down the stairs, unlocked the back door, and went out.

Although it was late spring—May 23rd, to be

precise—there seemed quite a nip in the air, and the grass on the wasteland was white with frost.

Soon, after turning a corner in the road, Hunt saw, drawn up on the grass edge by the roadside, the vehicles that had disturbed his night's rest. Three in all—a fire-engine, and two private cars.

Looking towards the headland for the first time Hunt saw where the trouble lay.

A thick bank of smoke hung over a hollow, and little bursts of flame were visible from time to time. He noticed, though, that each spurt was less active than its predecessor. The firemen seemed to have the outbreak well in hand.

As it was still some hours before breakfast-time Hunt decided to take a stroll over the headland and ascertain the nature of the outbreak.

He had picnicked on the Head on many occasions, and was puzzled by the fire, as he could remember no building in the vicinity except the Coastguard Station, which he could see was intact.

A sharp walk of a quarter of an hour's duration brought him to the scene. Immediately he saw the tangled wreckage he divined the cause of his abrupt awakening.

As he drew near to the little knot of waiting men he was recognised by Superintendent Walker, who drew apart from the others and went forward to meet him. "Well, bless my soul if it isn't Inspector Hunt," he began. "Fancy meeting you down here—especially at this ungodly hour."

"You're to blame for the hour, Superintendent. How do you expect a man to sleep when you drive

your ramshackle old Ford by his window at fifty miles an hour? But," he added in a more serious tone, "what's the trouble here?"

"It's hardly in your line, Inspector," answered Walker, "but no doubt you'll be shocked to know that in there, we believe, are the remains of Sir Charles Stafford and a Mrs. Evans!"

"Sir Charles Stafford!" echoed Hunt. "Surely not *the* Sir Charles Stafford?"

"Unfortunately!" replied Walker. "But nevertheless true, I'm afraid!"

Sir Charles Stafford!

In a flash the exploits of Sir Charles leapt vividly into Hunt's mind.

Barely a year ago he had startled the world by a daring, successful, double crossing of the Atlantic—alone—and in one of the smallest of light 'planes.

These had been the culminating flights of a series that he had made which had helped considerably to raise Britain's prestige in the air to a point not hitherto attained.

And now—disaster!—And by a cruel trick of fate, he, who had conquered dense jungles and mighty oceans, high perilous mountain ranges and torrential tropical storms, had met his end on a clear, calm morning in his native country.

And Mrs. Evans too.

He had seen both her and her husband several times, though he did not know them to speak to.

With a sickening feeling in his heart, he looked again towards the wreckage. Could it be possible that all that remained of the beautiful wife of young

Dennis Evans was the hideous, distorted body they could already see, or was it, even more horribly mutilated, lying still lower in the funeral pyre?

At last the metal-work seemed to have cooled enough to allow the firemen to remove the first body from the twisted mass of wires and broken, half-burned struts that held it prisoner.

Hunt, although he had during his career as a police officer seen death in many forms, could scarcely suppress a shudder at the ghastly scene now being enacted before his eyes.

Soon, however, the body—that of a man—was lifted clear, reverently laid out on a stretcher and covered with a sheet.

Again the firemen returned to the wreckage; the fuselage was soon hacked asunder and the burned fragments—charred almost to a powder—that had fallen in a heap on top of the half-buried engine, removed.

But no other body did they find.

Within a few minutes of the conclusion of the search Sir Charles' chauffeur-mechanic arrived with the butler. He seemed to pale slightly and sway at the sight of the body on the stretcher.

The Superintendent went over to them. "We have recovered a body from the wreckage," he began, "and we assume this is Sir Charles' plane—though we hope against hope we are wrong. Are you quite sure Mrs. Evans was in *this* machine? Mr. Evans is reported to have passed over here just before the crash. Might she not have been with him?"

"No," answered the mechanic. "I am *positive* that Mrs. Evans was with Sir Charles!"

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"Had she a parachute?" asked Hunt.

"No!" was the reply. "Sir Charles had, but neither Mr. nor Mrs. Evans ever carried one."

"In that case it's rather remarkable that Sir Charles didn't attempt to use it, isn't it?" commented Walker.

"It is—unless," replied Hunt, "unless he refused to jump and leave Mrs. Evans to her fate."

"If that's the explanation—and it's feasible—that would be the bravest thing that even *he* ever did—and his life was made up with doing things few other men would attempt," said the Superintendent.

"In that case, where is the body of Mrs. Evans? is the question we've got to answer," put in the sergeant.

Here Hunt again addressed the mechanic Bailey. "Is there any way in which you can positively identify this 'Moth' as Sir Charles'? It's no use attempting to form any theories until we are absolutely sure of our ground."

The man considered for a moment. "Yes," he answered, "I can tell you after I've had a look at the engine. Several parts of it are absolutely special fittings. There'd be no chance of any other 'plane having them."

A quick glance at the engine sufficed. "There's no doubt about it," he announced. "This is Sir Charles' machine."

"Well, now we know definitely, the next thing to do is to ring up Plymouth and get them to break the news to young Evans. It'll be a blow for him, no doubt. I'm glad I've not got to do it. He was

devoted to his wife, Inspector," said the Superintendent. "And having done that," he added, "we must try to find the body."

Old Pope soon got the necessary connection, and was talking to the caretaker at the aerodrome. The result of the call was in a way disappointing; Dennis Evans had not yet arrived.

"That's extraordinary, isn't it?" remarked the Superintendent. "It's just on half-past five, I believe." He looked at his watch. "Yes! your clock seems right by this—5.30 exactly. Plymouth to Lymington." He looked at the map on the station wall. "Let's see how far he had to fly."

"One hundred and fifty miles," answered Bailey. "I saw Sir Charles marking out the route yesterday."

The Superintendent had found a pencil and six-inch rule.

"I only make it one hundred and twenty," he declared.

"Yes," replied Bailey. "That's all it is in a straight line; but Sir Charles was not taking the long sea hops from Lymington to Swanage and Swanage to Torquay. He intended to follow the coastline. I know Mr. Evans would take the same route."

"Well—say a hundred and fifty miles. What would that little 'bus of Evans' do?"

"It's pretty fast," admitted Bailey. "It should average a good hundred miles per hour."

"I thought so," said the Superintendent. "In that case he's an hour overdue."

"Probably turned back when he missed the others,"

suggested Hunt, "in which case, if he hasn't given up the search and gone on again he'll soon be here."

"That's about it," agreed Walker. "Now let's get busy and see if we can't find out what has become of Mrs. Evans. I'm afraid she jumped without a parachute, and in all probability she fell into the harbour."

Those who are at all familiar with the district will realise that this was the most likely explanation, as the headland at the point where the crash took place is barely a quarter of a mile in width, bounded on its southern side by the English Channel, and on the northern by the broad expanse of Christchurch Harbour.

The distance across the harbour in a straight line running from the scene of the crash towards Lymington was a full two miles, and it was apparent that the Superintendent had set himself no mean task.

However, the little party split up and set to work in a willing manner. Mr. Jones, the farmer, had to go back to his duties, and Pope was told off to remain near the 'phone in case any news should come through concerning Evans.

The fire brigade captain and his men were set to work to search systematically the bushes and grass covering the two hundred and fifty yards or so of ground between the debris and the water's edge.

A constable, who had arrived some time previously with a police surgeon and some ambulance men (who had since removed the body), was posted to watch over the wreckage.

Hunt joined the other little party, made up of the

sergeant and constable from Christchurch, Bailey, Sturman the butler—and, of course, the Superintendent.

The sergeant started the engine, and the little boat drew slowly away from the shore.

There are several reed-covered mud-flats in the harbour, and by the time these had all been thoroughly gone over Hunt discovered that he would have to hurry to get back to his sister's in time for breakfast.

The other party had combed their ground long since and were gathered around Pope's hut. Neither group had met with success, nor had any news yet come through from Plymouth.

A couple of R.A.F. officers, however, had arrived not long after the search-parties set out, and they were still engaged in examining the burned-out plane. Seeing the Superintendent, they made over to him.

They also were somewhat puzzled, they said, by the failure of Sir Charles to jump, especially as they were convinced that Mrs. Evans had done so—without a parachute.

Of the cause of the crash they could say nothing yet; an Air Ministry examination would have to be held.

Regarding Mrs. Evans, they pointed out that, were Pope's account of the disaster correct—they saw no reason to doubt it, and the known facts confirmed it—then they had the strongest arguments to support it.

According to Pope, when he first saw the blazing machine it was flying in a normal position at a height

of approximately two thousand feet, and did not seem then to be out of control. It had, however, immediately afterwards commenced a spinning dive, and had Mrs. Evans been flung out during this descent it is reasonable to suppose that the body would have been discovered on the ground covered by the firemen.

Pope's figure of two thousand feet or thereabouts was confirmed in their opinion by that being the altitude they would have expected a "Moth," climbing leisurely and flying in a straight line from Lymington, and not waiting to circle the taking-off ground, to have reached.

Bailey had described the take-off and explained that the wind—what little there had been—had been blowing from a south-westerly direction, so the 'planes, after taking off against it in the usual manner, were, without turning directly, on their course.

Should they have had engine trouble before gaining sufficient height to glide back safely to their landing-ground they would have been faced with the difficulty of making a forced landing on unknown ground and in most uncertain moonlight. However, it was not the first time that Bailey had seen Sir Charles take this risk.

The distance the engine had buried itself in the earth, taking into consideration the weight of the 'plane and state of the ground, also supported Pope's estimate of the altitude.

The theory they put forward regarding Sir Charles' remaining in the cockpit was that he had attempted to bring the blazing machine down on

to the Head, and had been overcome by the fumes. That was, in their opinion, the only one to fit the facts.

Yes; they had heard of cases of 'planes catching fire at even greater altitudes and being brought to earth safely. Why, only a year or two ago there was the case of that other famous private 'plane owner, Pat Lloyd, who successfully brought down his blazing machine at a flying meeting up North. . . . Largely a matter of luck, though. . . . One has to side-slip a lot to keep the flames from the cockpit. Still it was possible.

Yes; no doubt Evans had made a forced landing. Rather a coincidence that—but plenty of safe landing-places along the coast. They both knew the route well. News would be along presently, no doubt. Hallo! Reporters, by the look of things. Extraordinary how soon they get on the scent.

The telephone bell rang again. Pope picked up the receiver.

"News of Evans, I bet," remarked the Superintendent.

But no!

"Wanted on the 'phone, sergeant," announced the coastguard, handing over the instrument.

"James speaking," answered the sergeant.

The voice at the other end could be heard indistinctly by those in the hut.

Then— "What?" the policeman cried. "Good God, no!—it can't be true!"

Dropping the instrument from his listless hand, it fell with a clatter on to the table.

He turned, facing the others. "My brother," he muttered brokenly, "Constable James. Found in a ditch in Redstock Lane—murdered!"

And as the sergeant spoke Hunt noticed Bailey, the mechanic, quiver, as if from a blow!

III

THE CRIME NEAR TOTLAND CORNER

THE little village of Redstock where Constable James was stationed can be reached from Bournemouth from two routes. The quicker probably is via Totland Corner on the main Lymington-Bournemouth road.

This was the one Superintendent Walker was taking at no small speed on that glorious May morning, with Inspector Hunt on the front seat beside him, and Sergeant James seated in the rear.

Directly the news of the younger James' death had been received the Superintendent had offered to drive the sergeant over to the village; and, thinking it probable that the local police would decide to call in Scotland Yard, he had invited Hunt to accompany them.

Hunt had accepted the invitation, and, after stopping for a moment at his sister's house and explaining that he would not be in to breakfast, he hurriedly rejoined the waiting couple.

Over the bridge at Tuckton, where the toll-collector, knowing the car, made no attempt to stop them, sharp right over the tram-lines at the cross-roads, on over the hump-backed narrow bridges on the main London road at Christchurch, and, after a fast run up the straight, right again towards Highcliffe.

A mile more, then a constable pulled them up. "We are diverting the traffic down the loop road to your right, sir," he explained. "Some footprints are visible near the body, and the Chief Constable does not want to run the risk of having them obliterated."

Parking the car where the constable indicated, they followed another constable through a gate into a field of young corn and along parallel to the main road until they came to the spot known as Totland Corner.

Then, after climbing over a fence into the adjoining meadow, they were asked to wait there for a few minutes while their guide went for Major Williams, the Chief Constable.

After a short interval, Hunt saw the Chief Constable, a rather stern, grey-moustached, military-looking man about fifty years of age, approaching.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, Superintendent," he began, "but we've a few interesting tracks that we want to keep distinct for as long as possible."

"That's quite all right, sir," said the Superintendent. "I've no business here myself really, but I brought Sergeant James over. However, I should like to introduce you to my friend Detective-Inspector Hunt—from the Yard.

"You've probably heard of him," continued Walker. "I expect you remember his handling of the Collier case?"

"I'm pleased to meet you," said the Chief Constable, shaking Hunt warmly by the hand. "Yes, I

recall the case quite well, and I must say I admired the capable way the Inspector handled it.

"But," he continued, "we haven't got a clever, scheming poisoner to deal with this time; instead—a callous, brutal murderer who shoots a man down in cold blood! We also have, I'm glad to say, some very good clues, and I fancy his arrest will only be the matter of a few hours."

"That's good!" remarked Hunt. "Let's hope so, at all events."

"Still," continued the Chief Constable, "now you're on the spot I don't intend to miss the chance of getting you to help me. It's more than probable that your trained eye will spot something we locals, unused to anything more serious than petty larceny, will overlook."

"Oh, no!" answered Hunt. "You mustn't expect too much. But, if you like, I will try to get permission from the Yard to stay on, and I'll do my best. Although," he added, "by your talk of an early arrest the case seems as good as over."

"Yes. I hope I'm right—but," he reminded them, "there's many a slip—you know the saying, Inspector. Now, before I take you to the spot where the body lies, shall I tell you as much as we know?"

"Yes, if you would," answered Hunt.

"Then, briefly—at seven o'clock this morning Sergeant Kirk at Christchurch had a 'phone call from Mr. Abbot of the Home Farm here to say that one of his cowmen, a man named Ball, had discovered Constable James, the village policeman, dead in a ditch in Redstock Lane. There was blood on his

face, and it was plain to the cowman that he had been shot.

"Kirk immediately instructed a constable to let me know, then he came out on his motorcycle combination with Constables Pryce and Brown, while the police surgeon followed in his car.

"He—that is, Kirk—saw at once that James had been murdered, and, noticing car tracks near the spot, closed the roads.

"The surgeon soon arrived, and, after a brief examination, was able to say that the constable had been dead some hours. Perhaps you'll see the cowman yourself, Inspector? He's coming over now."

"Thanks, sir, I will," replied Hunt. "So far the story is very clear."

The cowman, a diminutive little man, looked scared out of his wits. Hunt, however, obtained his story without difficulty.

Mr. Abbot, the cowman explained, had two farms—Home Farm, up the lane in the village of Redstock, and Manor Farm, near Chalton, a little hamlet on the loop road along which the traffic was being diverted.

He, Ball, had a cottage near Manor Farm, and it was his first duty in the morning to collect the cows from the meadows on his way up to work at the Home Farm.

This morning they had been in two meadows, the Valley and Angels.

He had set out at his usual time—6.30. Going across Valley Meadow, he had collected the cows in the usual way—thirty-nine he believed there were—and had gone on in front of them and opened the

gate, afterwards crossing the road and opening the gate in Angels.

After closing the gate behind him, he had been surprised to see the cows clustered round the hedge a short distance up the meadow. This is a low hedge, and the cows nearest to it were gazing with their heads over it, evidently watching something in the lane. As he approached them, he noticed that the other cows which had spent the night in Angels had already run from the vicinity of the pond to the gate. Upon drawing close to the herded cattle, he had looked over the hedge and had been staggered to see the body of the village policeman sprawled on his back in the ditch.

He had scrambled over the hedge, and found, to his surprise, that the dead constable had blood on his face and uniform, and what looked like a bullet wound in his forehead. He had some difficulty in getting the cows away from the spot, but eventually managed to, and hurried up to the Home Farm, where he informed Mr. Abbot of his discovery.

"That's all very clear," said Hunt, when the cowman had concluded. "Just a question or two and that will be all. Firstly, I take it that we are now standing in Valley Meadow?"

"Yes," replied Ball, "this is Valley Meadow."

"And is that your cottage I can see down at the other end by the farm?"

"Yes," answered the cowman again. "That's it."

"Be about half a mile away, wouldn't it?" said Hunt, half to himself. Then—"Did you hear any shot in the night?" he asked.

"No," was the reply, but Ball added that he had been disturbed by the noise of an aeroplane.

Dismissing the cowman, Hunt crossed the road and passed through the gate into Angels. Walking up by the hedge for a distance of about fifty yards, he came to the spot opposite to where the body lay.

The passing of the cows had obliterated any footprints that might have been there previously—and the few showing now had obviously been made recently, as they were on top of the cow-tracks.

Satisfied that no clues were to be found there, Hunt climbed the hedge, using the same place that the others had done.

"One good point about this case," he thought, "is that Sergeant Kirk has been careful to keep all the recent footprints to the same comparatively narrow section of the road, and I shall not have to spend half the morning sorting out the footsteps of the police and others concerned from any that may have been made by the murderer."

The body still lay undisturbed, facing the road, in the spot where it was found. For the second time that morning it was not a pleasant sight that presented itself to the Inspector's eyes.

The head was in a slightly higher position than the body, and blood had flowed freely from the wound across the face—and down the breast of the blue tunic there was left a crimson stain.

After a short glance at the corpse, Hunt turned his attention to the surface of the road.

A set of footprints running from somewhere higher up the lane down past where he now stood caught his eye.

Following them, walking on the grassy border of the ditch, he found they ran to the bottom of the lane. (The spot known as Totland Corner.)

Here they crossed and re-crossed the narrow lane a number of times but did not appear to go beyond it on to the main Bournemouth-Lymington road before running back near the opposite bank until they drew out suddenly to the ditch-side again.

At this point they showed the maker of them had stopped and turned round.

Hunt glanced at the dead constable's boots, and saw they were responsible for the tracks—as he had guessed. The U-shaped metal heel of the left one had worn noticeably to one side, and the prints he had found, on a close examination, showed this peculiarity.

He then turned his attention to another set of foot-prints intermingled with the others, made, he saw, by a considerably smaller foot than the dead constable's.

They started three-quarters of the way across the lane, facing the ditch, just where the body lay, taking, he could trace, a couple of steps in that direction.

There the maker seemed to have stopped for a moment. Hunt could see the slightly deeper impress, especially of the toe of the more forward print. Then they turned, and, after two more paces, vanished.

It was obvious that the person responsible for the tracks had climbed out of the car, walked to the ditch, stopped, turned; and, after retracing his steps,

re-entered the vehicle. The tracks of a car showed up plainly at this point.

Hunt next inspected these car-tracks. At the spot where the footsteps vanished he could see by the much deeper marks that the car had stopped. This was exactly what he had expected to find.

A few drops of heavy oil had fallen here between the wheel-tracks, and still showed up plainly on the soft, damp surface of the lane.

He could see quite plainly, too, that the car had afterwards gone on up the lane towards Redstock, the cut-up surface of the roadway suggesting the departure had been hurried.

Following the tire-tracks down the lane, the Inspector noticed that in places they overlapped the prints of the dead constable. On reaching Totland Corner, he found that the car had come from the direction of Lymington, before turning into Redstock Lane.

A good look round failed to reveal any more prints—except those made by the police and cowman—anywhere in the lane.

On the main road, however, there were four other distinct sets of car-tracks. The first was obviously the track of a heavy lorry and was definitely not made as recently as the other three. (Later Hunt ascertained that it was the delivery lorry of a brick and tile manufacturer returning late to Highcliffe.)

The second tracks were those of a motor-cycle combination, subsequently traced to a builder's son at Highcliffe who had been to a theatre in Bourne-mouth, returning about midnight.

The fourth tracks, which over-ran all the others,

were those made by the butler and mechanic on their run to Hengistbury Head. Hunt had noticed that the tires of the Rover they arrived in were all new Dunlops.

Only the third set remained untraced.

These overlapped the lorry and combination tracks, but were themselves crossed by the Rover's.

However, as they had themselves been lapped by the car he took to be the murderer's—and did not appear to have stopped—Hunt dismissed them as of no importance.

Then, returning to where the Chief Constable stood directing a policeman, who was busily engaged in taking photographs of the body and the various prints on the road, he looked carefully at the plaster casts that Major Williams had taken.

They were almost perfect, and he saw at once that they could not be bettered.

"So you've finished, Inspector," observed the Chief Constable. "May I ask what you make of the case?"

"The same as you do, sir, I think," replied Hunt. "It seems very straightforward. Find the car—a large one—with the V-shaped flint cut in the near front tire and you'll soon have your man—unless, of course, it's been stolen."

"Exactly, Inspector; that's what we've got to do now; and, as I told you, I believe it won't take long. The following has been sent out to all police stations:

"Wanted for MURDER. Driver of a large car, probably over twenty horse power. Fitted four almost new Firestone extra heavy sports tires, size 31 x 5.25. Large V-shaped cut in the near front

one. This car was in the vicinity of Redstock and Highcliffe between midnight and 4 A.M., May 23rd. Driver is probably a small man. Was wearing shoes size 6. Fitted new "Uskide" soles.'

"Every constable in the country will be looking for that car, and promotion, by now," he added.

Just then a plain-clothes man came up to them. "I've discovered a set of prints in the meadow—running this way," he announced.

"Let's go and have a look at them," said the Chief Constable.

The detective led the way. About midway up the meadow, almost in the centre of it, was a patch of boggy ground.

Here the tracks of a man's boots were plainly visible. They appeared to lead from the corner opposite to that near which the body lay.

Hunt followed them for about fifty yards, losing them in a maze of cattle-tracks. Continuing in the direction they appeared to lead from, he came to a gate in the corner of the meadow.

But no further trace of them did he find, although he diligently searched both sides of the hedge from the farm right round to the pond.

Returning to the marshy patch, he picked up the trail again, only to lose it later some fifty yards from the lane, and a good hundred yards higher up than the spot where the body lay.

Here again Hunt made a thorough search, but the mass of cattle-tracks running parallel to the lane made it impossible for him to find the prints again in the meadow. He knew from his examination of

an hour previously that they were not in the lane.

A further search round the remaining sides of the meadow revealed nothing. Both ends of the tracks vanished entirely.

On their arrival at the marshy portion of the meadow, Major Williams had set to work taking casts of these new prints, while Hunt endeavoured to find out from whence they came and to where they led.

After satisfying himself that all traces of them were indeed lost after the passing of the cows, Hunt returned, to find the Chief Constable had completed his task.

"I don't think these have any bearing on the case," he said, "or we should have had traces of them in the lane, but it's as well to make sure of everything in a case like this. Now," he added temptingly, "Mr. Abbot has sent to say that if we could spare the time to go over to the farm, his wife would be glad to serve us a meal. What about it?"

Hunt was by this time ravenously hungry, and welcomed the suggestion.

Mrs. Abbot apologised profusely for what she called such a "slap-up meal," but to the two famished officials the eggs and bacon were as welcome as manna from Heaven.

They found the Superintendent had been 'phoning up the coastguard station, and Hunt learned to his surprise that no news had yet been received of Evans.

The doctor was holding a post-mortem examination on the body of Sir Charles that morning, and the inquest was fixed for 4.30 that afternoon.

While Hunt and Major Williams did justice to the meal, Walker sat listening to the Chief Constable's story of his discoveries.

He also was of the opinion that the car-tracks and footsteps in the lane were made by the murderer. The footsteps in the meadow, he thought, had been made by a gipsy taking a short cut from the Forest (where any number were encamped) across the fields to the main road.

But, although Hunt realized that this was more than likely the correct explanation, he hated leaving loose ends in a case, and determined that he would look into the matter more closely before being as certain again, as he had been before the finding of the prints, that the Chief Constable's deductions were correct.

IV

THE SENSATION AT THE INQUEST

THE inquest on the dead policeman had been fixed for three o'clock that afternoon. Hunt decided, although he would be unlikely to hear anything new about the case, to attend on the off-chance of something fresh coming to light.

However, little did. The proceedings were almost immediately adjourned to give the police time to make their inquiries. Only Sergeant James' evidence of identification, and then that of the doctor, being taken.

Dr. Willing, the police surgeon, said that he had found the bullet lodged in the back of the brain, and, after exhibiting it to the jury, he passed it over to the Chief Constable.

Hunt, when he saw it, was of the opinion that it was a .22, but it was badly flattened and he was not prepared to swear to it. He pocketed it, however, for future reference.

So, by a quarter to four, he found himself once more in the road. Just as he had decided he could do no more there that day, and was wondering how he could best get back to Southbourne, the Superintendent appeared, coming, it seemed, from the direction of Bournemouth, and drew up alongside him.

"Doing anything important?" he asked, lowering the window of the saloon.

"No," replied Hunt. "I'm just going back to Southbourne to get a shave and a decent meal."

"I'll drive you, then," said Walker, "and, if you're not too tired, I should like you to take a spot of tea with me at a little café I know at Christchurch, and then come along to the inquest on poor Sir Charles. I think it will interest you—in fact I know it will! By the way, no news of young Evans yet—at least, not up until I left the station half an hour ago. Funny that—it seems to me.

"Of course, he may have landed on some isolated corner of Dartmoor, although I understand that would not be directly on his route."

"Oh, yes!" said Hunt. "I'd forgotten the inquest was this afternoon. I'd like to come."

He climbed into the car, and a few minutes later they were seated in the café on the outskirts of Christchurch. The predominant topic of conversation here appeared to be the fate of Sir Charles Stafford. The occupants of a nearby table, Hunt noted, were engaged in fierce argument as to who had ranked as our No. 1 pilot prior to the baronet's crash on the Head. The man on Hunt's right voted Stafford, his younger companion was loud in his praise for Pat Lloyd, while the two lady members of the party were agreed that Jean LeLac, the handsome young Anglo-French airman, deserved the palm. However, as time was pressing, Hunt was not allowed to remain to hear the finish of the argument.

The inquest was being held at the "Bull." As Walker pulled the car up outside the premises, Hunt noticed quite a crowd of would-be hearers, many of them women, who had, he guessed, hurried down from

Town as soon as they received the news of the disaster.

It was apparent that, owing to lack of room, they had, despite their journey, been unable to gain admittance to the improvised court. It had always seemed a strange thing to Hunt that Sir Charles, who had the whole feminine world at his feet, had never married, and as he looked at the many beautiful women, some obviously on the verge of tears—one or two playthings of the dead man, he knew—he was more surprised than ever.

Inside, the little room was crowded, and Hunt could see several leading airmen among those present. The detachable leaves of the billiard-table had been replaced, and seated at the head of it was Dr. Wild, the Coroner, while down each side sat the members of the jury.

The Coroner opened the proceedings with a short speech deploring the circumstances that had gathered them together that afternoon.

He then paid a brief tribute to the flying achievements of the late Sir Charles, mentioning especially his lone Atlantic flights and his record-breaking flight to Australia and back. "We all feel," he concluded, "that the world will be left the poorer by the passing of so gallant a gentleman!"

Then, after he had briefly thanked several aeronautical experts who were present, including the aforementioned Pat Lloyd, for their offer of advice on any technical points that might arise, the jury were sworn in and taken to view the remains. And as they filed back after completing the sordid task the law demands and which must be fulfilled, Hunt could

see that they had been shaken to a man by the awful sight they had had to see.

The first witness was William Pope, the coast-guard. He repeated his story of the disaster. The Coroner had no questions to ask him, and he was allowed to stand down.

The butler, James Henry Sturman, was then called.

He was obviously affected, and gave his evidence at first in a halting manner. He said he was in the service of the late Sir Charles Stafford at Forest Court, near Lymington. He had held that position for the last twelve months.

He was then shown a gold hunter watch, a bunch of keys, some buttons, and a wallet. He had no difficulty in identifying the articles as the property of Sir Charles Stafford.

Asked to explain more fully how he could be sure that the watch was not one similar to Sir Charles', he replied that this watch had been presented to Sir Charles on the completion of his Atlantic flights, and bore an inscription on the back of four and a half lines. He could still see traces of these lines. There was no doubt about it—this was Sir Charles' watch!

The keys, he said, he had frequently used himself. He gave a detailed account of the use of each. The wallet he identified by its metal clasp.

As for the buttons—they were off a new suit of plus-fours Sir Charles had had made recently. He could, even now, swear to the burned material hanging from them.

Satisfied, the Coroner turned to face his man more squarely. "Now. Will you please tell us exactly

what happened on the evening of the 22nd and early morning of the 23rd of May?"

Sturman seemed to consider a moment before commencing. "Last evening," he began, "Sir Charles gave a little dinner-party to a few friends. It was a farewell party—he was due to sail to-day from Plymouth on a prolonged visit to America.

"Mr. and Mrs. Evans were going with him. They had arrived by air in the early afternoon.

"The other guests, a Mr. and Mrs. Lovel, Mr. Day, and the two Miss Fensomes, also arrived early.

"Dinner was served at eight. At ten o'clock all the guests left except Mr. Day—and, of course, Mr. and Mrs. Evans."

He, Sturman, was then told he could retire until 2.30 a.m.—which he did. He believed Sir Charles and Mr. and Mrs. Evans then went out into the grounds. He could not say what happened after that.

The next time he saw Sir Charles was 2.45 a.m. Here the Coroner interrupted. "You say Sir Charles and Mr. and Mrs. Evans went into the grounds about ten. Did not this Mr. Day accompany them?"

Sturman hesitated for a moment, then, flushing, he answered, "No."

The Coroner had noticed his embarrassment. "Will you please tell us what happened to Mr. Day?"

Again Sturman hesitated. Then—"Mr. Day was feeling unwell; he went to lie down," he answered.

Hunt realised instantly what the Coroner was driving at; guessed correctly, too, what the next question would be.

"Were any of the party under the influence of drink? I know this is a painful question, but it must be answered!"

The butler was now decidedly uncomfortable. "Yes. I'm afraid so," he answered at length.

"Will you please name those who were?"

For a moment Hunt thought Sturman would refuse to answer. Eventually, choking his indignation, he did reply. "Yes. Only Mr. Day."

"You are sure that neither your late master nor Mr. Evans were also?"

"Quite sure," replied the butler. "Mr. Day was the only culprit."

"You realise that this is a most important question and you are on oath?" insisted the Coroner.

"I have answered it—against my wish," said the butler hotly.

The Coroner overlooked this outburst and continued. "And you saw Sir Charles again at 2.45?"

"Yes. Sir Charles was in flying kit," went on the butler. "He was in the room he used as his office. Mr. and Mrs. Evans and Mr. Day were with him. Mr. Day was still intoxicated," he added maliciously for the Coroner's benefit. "All four of them had a small glass of whisky."

"You mean Mrs. Evans as well?" asked the Coroner, somewhat surprised.

"Yes. Mrs. Evans as well," replied Sturman, now really annoyed.

"And then—"

"I went out to the hangars to see that everything was ready. Sir Charles, Mr. and Mrs. Evans, and Mr. Day soon followed.

"Mr. Evans climbed into his little monoplane, started the engine—he had a self-starter—and taxied slowly out across the park.

"I helped Mrs. Evans into the front seat of the 'Moth,' and handed her up the little travelling-bag she was carrying.

"Sir Charles swung the propeller. The engine started first swing. Then he climbed in behind Mrs. Evans, and, after I had handed him up his portmanteau, he opened up and followed Mr. Evans out.

"I then closed the hangar doors and went into the house again. A few minutes later, first one and then the other 'plane roared over the housetop.

"Mr. Day had gone in before me. I found him in the office. He said he had decided to go back to Town that night instead of staying on as he had at first intended. After another drink, he had, although I tried to dissuade him, insisted on leaving. . . . Although he was not, in my opinion, in a fit state to drive a car, he managed, after two or three attempts, to start his engine and drive away."

"Thank you," said the Coroner, seeing Sturman had concluded. "That's all very clear. Now, just one or two questions, please, then you may stand down. Where is the hangar you spoke of situated?"

The hangar, Sturman explained, was a building Sir Charles had erected and was attached to one side of the house. It could be entered from the house by a door at the end of a passage. There was no need to go outside to get to it. The garage was built on the same plan, and was really part of the hangar.

"I imagined so," observed the Coroner. "Now, lastly—what had Sir Charles in his portmanteau?"

"Oh, only his designs and private papers, I believe," said the butler. "I can't say definitely, as I didn't see him pack it."

The next witness was Horace William Golding, a dental surgeon of Lymington.

He said Sir Charles was one of his patients. He was shown a set of badly distorted false teeth. He was able to say immediately that, despite their condition, he could recognise them as a set he made recently for the late Sir Charles Stafford. He could positively identify them by a gold tooth on the right side of the upper plate. He thought it unusual to put a gold tooth in a complete set, but Sir Charles had insisted and he had done so.

This concluded Mr. Golding's evidence, and Sir Charles' valet, Horace Stone, was called.

He identified the watch, keys, wallet, and buttons as Sir Charles' property. He explained that Sir Charles' luggage had already gone forward, and that to the best of his knowledge the portmanteau contained only papers.

Next, Bailey, the chauffeur-mechanic, was called. He seemed to Hunt to be in a state of abject terror.

The Coroner noticed his nervousness, and began his examination in a kindly tone. In reply to his questions, the mechanic said he had been in Sir Charles' service for the past two years. He had gained some knowledge of aircraft whilst serving with the R.A.F. towards the latter part of the war.

Sir Charles had lately taken him in hand and he was now a qualified pilot. It had been arranged that he was to go to Plymouth and fly the machine back that day.

He had previously been asked to make a rough sketch of the house and grounds, and this he now produced and handed to the Coroner.

At a quarter to three that morning he had gone from his house to the searchlight that Sir Charles used to aid him to take off in the dark. He had immediately switched this on.

At about five minutes to three the 'planes taxied out. They stopped by him and ran up their engines for a time. He went over to Sir Charles to ask if the searchlight was throwing the beam in the right direction. Mrs. Evans was in the 'plane. Mr. Evans had got out of his 'plane and gone over to the "Moth." He saw Mrs. Evans speak to him.

Sir Charles then taxied into the far corner of the ground. Mr. Evans' engine began "spitting back." After a couple of minutes, however, it got going properly again—and he too taxied to the far corner.

Then for some inexplicable reason his light went out of order. He managed to get it going again after about thirty seconds.

A minute or so later Mr. Evans took off. Just as he was getting up speed, the light flickered again—only for a few seconds, though.

Mr. Evans was travelling too fast to stop, and had managed to take off in the dark—a very risky procedure. . . . But luck favoured him, and he got clear.

A moment later Sir Charles taxied by at speed—and, by some amazing coincidence, the light flickered yet a third time. Sir Charles, however, was not

going quite so fast as Mr. Evans had been, and he managed to pull up safely.

He had then turned round half way down the park. Bailey could see him plainly now—the light was on once more.

He then taxied back to the spot where he had stopped before, and got out of his 'plane. Coming over to Bailey, he had cursed him for not seeing that the light was kept in good working order.

Then, going back to the 'plane, he had spoken to Mrs. Evans, climbed in, and taxied once again to the far corner. This time he had taken off without incident. Mrs. Evans was definitely still in the 'plane, for as the machine raced by he had seen her hair blowing in the wind. He had noticed, he added, that she never wore a hat when flying.

The time then was exactly three o'clock; he heard a clock strike the hour—in Lymington, he believed.

He had waited until the 'planes got well away before turning off the light (in case they had engine trouble and needed its beam to land by) and going back to bed.

He had been disturbed later by the butler ringing him up—he had a 'phone extension to his house. That was all he could tell—except, of course, his seeing the wreckage of the "Moth" on the Head.

"That evidence was remarkably clear," said the Coroner. "If all witnesses kept so closely to the point, I should get through these proceedings in half the time I now take. One question before you go—can you tell me what kind of weather you had at Lymington last evening?"

"Yes," replied the mechanic. "It held fine up

until just after eleven, and then we had a couple of hours' steady downpour."

"That will be all for the moment, I think," said the Coroner, motioning him to stand down.

Miss Elsie Fensome was next called. She corroborated the evidence. She was certain Sir Charles was not drunk. After dinner, she continued, they played a short game of roulette—only for an hour or so; then they all went home, except Mr. Day, who, she regretted, had made a pig of himself.

Yes, she had seen his car—a magnificent Rolls-Royce. Almost new.

This was all Miss Fensome could tell.

Hunt began to wonder if the Superintendent had meant by his remark, "I think it will interest you—in fact, I know it will," that it would come out in evidence that a drunken man in a Rolls-Royce car had been driving in the vicinity of Redstock Lane at the approximate hour of the murder. (He guessed Mr. Day would take the Lymington-Bournemouth road past Totland Corner until he reached the main London-Bournemouth road.)

The matter certainly wanted looking into, but he did not think a man would go to the trouble of fitting non-standard tires to a new car, no matter how good the tires might be. Rolls-Royce, he knew, had standardised Dunlop.

He could see the proceedings were drawing to a close. The Coroner was whispering to the Superintendent, who nodded in reply.

"Dr. Lawrence Grier."

The doctor went up to the table.

"You are police surgeon at Bournemouth?" asked the Coroner.

"I am, sir," was the reply.

"At 4.15 this morning you examined the body of Sir Charles Stafford on Hengistbury Head?"

"That is correct, sir."

"In consequence of what you saw you held a post-mortem examination later?"

"I did, sir—assisted by Dr. Robinson."

"And did you ascertain the cause of death?"

"We did, sir."

"And you found—?"

"In simple language—a bullet wound in the brain!"

V

THEORIES

HAD a bomb exploded in the little room it could hardly have produced a bigger sensation than did these few words of the doctor's.

For a moment it seemed to Hunt that he could have heard a pin drop. Then a hysterical sob broke the silence; a woman at the back fainted, and the onlookers began excitedly talking to one another.

The Coroner, Superintendent, and doctor, who had known, of course, what was coming, alone remained unmoved. Even Hunt, hardened by years of police work to shocks and surprises, could hardly believe his ears. Now it was plain why Walker had wished him to be present. It looked like another murder.

The Coroner rapped for silence. It was obvious that he had more questions to ask the doctor. Everyone became all attention again. Every eye was fastened on the medical man—but he remained oblivious to their stares; not a muscle of his face moved.

"And could," went on the Coroner, "the wound have been self-inflicted?"

"It could—but it seems highly improbable that it was. The bullet entered the base of the skull behind the ears, traversed the brain, and was removed from behind the forehead."

Here the doctor produced the bullet; it was handed

to the jury, who examined it carefully, though what they expected to learn from it was a puzzle to Hunt. It was then passed up to the Superintendent, who in turn handed it to the C.I.D. man.

This bullet, also, was badly flattened, but Hunt, after comparing it with the other one, which he still had on him, was convinced that this too was a .22.

This was a coincidence that required the most careful looking into. He decided to send them both up to the experts at the Yard, who would, he knew, not only tell him the calibre quite definitely, but also whether or no they were both discharged from the same barrel.

The doctor was continuing his evidence. "For the wound to have been self-inflicted," he said, "it would have been necessary for the deceased to have held the weapon in the left hand behind the back of the head."

This concluded the medical evidence, Dr. Robinson not being called.

After a short conversation with the Superintendent, the Coroner recalled the mechanic, Bailey. "Was Sir Charles left-handed?" he asked.

"No," was the reply. "Right-handed always."

At this stage the Coroner adjourned the inquest indefinitely to give the police time to make their inquiries.

Hunt and the Superintendent followed the Chief Constable, who had arrived during the taking of Bailey's evidence, into a private sitting-room, where he motioned them to seat themselves.

"Now," he began, "we've got a mystery this time if you like—a case without parallel, to the best of my knowledge—and, if the good name of the British

police force is to be upheld, we've got to solve it."

"Hear, hear!" put in Walker. "And, if we don't want the Press to ridicule us, we've got to act quickly."

"We have indeed," agreed Hunt. "And, so far as I'm concerned, even if it means working all night I'm game."

"And I too," announced Walker, "although I've already had some sixteen hours on the go—without a break."

"Well—what's the next move to be?" asked Hunt.

They sat in silence for a while. The Chief Constable passed round his cigarettes. "Yes," he said presently, "it's a puzzle to know just where to begin. I think perhaps we'd better run over the evidence again. There must be a clue somewhere that we have missed.

"To start with, I take it that you agree that Sir Charles met his death between 3 and 3.17 this morning." [3.17 was the exact time of the crash on the headland, according to Pope, who supplied the information to the Superintendent soon after he arrived on the scene. It will be remembered that the Superintendent afterwards checked Pope's clock by his watch and found it correct.]

The others nodded.

"In that case, he could have been murdered only at Lymington, in the air, or after the crash on the Head."

Again the others had to agree.

"We know from what the doctor told Superintendent Walker that he could not possibly have survived the crash. We know from Bailey's evidence that

he was not murdered at Lymington. That leaves us only the possibility that he was murdered in the air. Do you agree to that?"

"Yes," replied the Superintendent. "Partly. But, don't forget, we have only the word of one man that he was not murdered at Lymington."

"Yes," replied the Chief Constable. "I had overlooked that point. But for the moment I accept Bailey's evidence."

"Again," put in Walker, "though you know he was dead the moment he hit the ground on the Head, you don't know that someone, either urged by some insane impulse or realising that it was impossible to save him from the fury of the flames, didn't put a bullet through his brain."

"We do," objected the Chief Constable. "We know from Pope's evidence that owing to the heat no one could get near to the wreckage."

"But," retorted Walker, "again you only have the evidence of one man."

"No," put in Hunt. "I accept Pope's evidence as correct. Besides, the odds against anyone being on the head, just by the spot—and in possession of a revolver—at 3.17 a.m. are enormous."

"I think so too," went on the Chief Constable. "Then that leaves us with the possibility that he was murdered in the air."

"Now, to get murder in the air suggests another aeroplane. Remember the unusual hour—3.17 a.m. Not much chance of another aeroplane passing in the ordinary way. But we know there was one, piloted by his friend Dennis Evans. . . . And, when that friend disappears, you must admit that the case

against him begins to look suspicious, to say the least of it."

"Yes," answered Walker, "but when you add the fact that the woman he loves was also in the 'plane, suspicion is instantly removed."

"But do we know he loved her?" asked Hunt. "A good many people keep up the deception in public, remember."

"That may be so," replied Walker. "Probably is. But I know, I am positive, that young Evans thought the world of his wife. I don't know that she returned his love, mind you—I think so, though."

"I haven't finished yet," continued the Chief Constable. "Another way to commit murder in the air would be to stow away on the aeroplane, or go openly as passenger, commit the murder, and escape by parachute."

"Yes," said Hunt thoughtfully, "that's an alternative. Now, in a 'Moth' there could be no room to stow away. That leaves the murderer only the chance to go as passenger. In this case there was a passenger—Mrs. Evans."

"We know Mrs. Evans had no parachute. The question is, had Mrs. Evans the means by which she could murder Sir Charles—in this case a revolver or an automatic—and also, had she the motive? Remember, the motive in her case would have had to have been exceptionally strong for she herself would also have had to have been prepared to perish."

"Yes, we must look into the question of motive very carefully, Inspector, but it need not be as strong as you think. To start with, once again we have only one man's evidence—again Bailey's—that she had no

parachute. Now let's suppose Mrs. Evans had a parachute and committed the crime—say over Christchurch Harbour. Parachutes don't always open. If hers didn't, where would she have gone had she fallen on a mud-flat?"

"Why, out of sight—held down by the mud. I never thought of that," answered the Superintendent. "That's about what happened. . . . Probably we shall never know the truth."

"Yes, exactly," said the Chief Constable. "Out of sight in the mud. But that's only one of the possibilities. Suppose, again, this time accepting Bailey's evidence that she had no parachute, that she shot Sir Charles when over the same place—those soft, seldom visited mud-flats. The 'plane, Bailey tells me, was fitted with dual control. All she need have done after committing the murder would have been to turn the machine upside down. The body would have dropped, and, as Walker pointed out, it would remain buried deep in the mud for all time.

"Now we know that she didn't carry out this plan successfully, but we don't know that it wasn't attempted. In all probability, if this was the method she used, after the shooting of Sir Charles she turned the 'Moth' upside down, but, for some reason that we may never discover, his body failed to drop. Lots of things may have happened—it's not hard to imagine it getting caught up in some way. Then, before she righted the 'plane again, it may have caught fire—in which case she may have lost her nerve and jumped, meeting the end she had planned for Sir Charles."

"That all sounds very cut and dried, sir," the

Superintendent remarked, "but assuming, as you are, that Mrs. Evans intended to save her own life, you come up against a snag. What would Mrs. Evans tell the authorities had happened to Sir Charles?"

"The question I expected, Walker. The answer is obvious. She would say they hit a bump or air-pocket that turned the machine over, throwing Sir Charles out. Simple, isn't it?"

"I'm sorry," put in Hunt again, "but I see another snag. Don't you think that the odds against Mrs. Evans' being able to turn the 'plane over exactly at the right moment for the body to fall on a mud-flat are very great? And if the body didn't fall on a mud-flat it would fall in the harbour itself—and that would mean that sooner or later it would come to light. And then the doctors would have found the bullet wound, and things would have begun to look black against Mrs. Evans. No, I can't agree with your theory—I'm afraid it's too far fetched."

"Possibly, Inspector. Perhaps the risk would be too big for her to take. But I've still one more possibility. Supposing Mr. and Mrs. Evans were working in collusion . . . would it have been possible for Mrs. Evans to have shot Sir Charles, set the 'plane on fire, and jumped to her husband's 'plane beneath—without a parachute, mind you—I remember reading an account of a stunt flyer doing this in America—for the films, I believe."

"It *could* have been done in daylight, I suppose—but remember, this murder was committed in the dark," replied Hunt.

"Yes—I didn't take that factor into considera-

tion," assented the Chief Constable. "I think we can safely leave that theory out."

"Well," started the Superintendent, "we don't seem to have made much progress, for all our theories have met with objections, but I think I can see what our next move must be. Pull me up if you find my reasoning at fault."

"It seems to me that, in spite of the various objections, Mrs. Evans is still the strongest suspect. If we accept Bailey's evidence, she had no parachute, and it follows that she perished. To make a case out against her it is necessary to find the motive—and, as Inspector Hunt says, it's got to be a very strong one. This means an examination of her household—a trip to Moorlands appears to me to be indicated."

"Again, taking the other theory—improbable as it appears to me—that young Evans murdered both Sir Charles and his wife. Again we need a motive, and again the best place to look for evidence that that motive exists is Moorlands."

"Yes, I think you're right," agreed the Chief Constable. Then, "What do you suggest, Inspector—you seem to be thinking deeply?" he asked.

"I am," answered Hunt with a smile. "I'm thinking of one of the extraordinary features of the case that both you and Superintendent Walker appear to have overlooked."

"And that is?" asked the Chief Constable eagerly.

"Why did it take Sir Charles seventeen minutes to fly a distance of only twelve miles?"

"A point we've missed, Inspector, as you say. I wonder? Even if my theory of Mrs. Evans' tipping,

or, rather, attempting to tip, the body out is correct, it doesn't explain the loss of time satisfactorily.

"The speed of Sir Charles' 'plane would be at least a hundred miles an hour. Twelve miles at a hundred miles per hour. That would take him, roughly, just over seven minutes. A margin of ten unaccounted for."

"No, hardly that, sir. He wouldn't do that speed whilst climbing. We know it was a 'hotted up' machine, and would climb on a calm day at a good eighty miles per hour, but, to be on the safe side, we'll say he only did seventy. The wind was negligible—we'll say ten miles per hour. That brings his speed over the land down to sixty miles per hour. At that rate it should have taken him just twelve minutes—he should have been over the Head at 3.12. There's still a deficit of five minutes, even with my generous figures. The time taken to tip a body out would hardly run into seconds, of course."

"Well, what is your theory, Inspector? You've formed one, I wager," said the Chief Constable.

"Not yet, sir. I'm trying to decide if he could have landed. I know it would be terribly risky to attempt to do so in the dark, if not impossible, especially as we know he took off again. But, even if he did, I fail to see where it all fits in," replied Hunt.

"I believe you said *one* of the points we had overlooked?" queried the Superintendent. "Don't tell us we have missed another."

"I'm afraid you have, Superintendent, and in my opinion it's the most important and obvious factor in the whole case."

"And what is it?"

"Simply that whoever killed Sir Charles murdered the policeman also. But I agree," the Yard man added, "that the only thing for us to do now is to go along to young Evans' place and try to pick up some helpful information."

VI

HUNT VISITS MOORLANDS

THE little discussion had taken the three only half an hour, so by seven o'clock Hunt found himself once more in Walker's car. This time, though, he was occupying the rear seat, the Chief Constable being seated in the Inspector's original place.

As he left the "Bull" to enter the car the Yard man bought a paper from a newsboy standing near, and as soon as they were on the move he turned up the accounts of the tragedies.

He found his photograph in a prominent position on the front page, and a very flattering reference to himself in the column beneath.

"Inspector Hunt, of the C.I.D.," he read, "is in charge of the case [this was, of course, the case of the murdered Constable James, the result of the inquest on Sir Charles not yet having reached the papers], and if he shows his usual brilliance the murderer will, no doubt, soon be brought to justice.

"Inspector Hunt," it continued, "it will be remembered, was responsible for the arrest and conviction of Ernest Collier, the Guildford poisoner. His handling of the case, when his superiors had all failed dismally, won him well-deserved praise and promotion from the authorities, and he is still the youngest detective-inspector at the Yard. Indeed, it seemed hard to believe that the almost boyish figure seated

next to the Chief Constable at the inquest this afternoon was Inspector Hunt, the possessor of one of the ablest brains in the force to-day."

Hunt smiled as he read the compliment. True, he was young, and felt young. At thirty-two it needed still more than a couple of murders to damp his outlook on life.

Glancing over the account of the murder of Constable James, who was described as one of the most promising young officers in the local constabulary, and an invaluable member of the "Rovers" football team, he passed on to the account of the disaster on the Head.

"Sir Charles Stafford," he read, "will be remembered chiefly for his pioneer work in aviation. His lone double crossing of the Atlantic in a —— will stand for all time as an epic example to the world of what British courage and British machinery can accomplish.

"Born in 1899 in Bermuda, he was brought to England at an early age. After a few years at a preparatory school he entered —— [here the name of a famous Public School was mentioned], his education being interrupted by the war. He saw service in France with the Air Force from July 1917 until the cessation of hostilities.

"He then went up to Oxford, where he distinguished himself in all branches of sport. He was a member of O.U.D.S. After completing his studies, he devoted his attention to aeronautical affairs, mostly on the Continent, and in 19—— began to blaze the trail with long-distance flights to all quarters of the globe. He was unmarried."

As he read, Hunt recalled the tumultuous welcome Sir Charles had received in Town after his Atlantic flights, and saw again the graceful, well-set-up figure and smiling, handsome features of the baronet acknowledging the cheers of the populace; and as the fleeting vision passed he swore to himself that he would do all he could to bring the murderer to justice.

Looking down the column, he found a short reference to Dennis Evans. "Mr. Evans," he read, "has resided on the outskirts of Bournemouth for the past three years. Both he and his wife, the passenger referred to above, are very popular locally. They have both taken a keen interest in one of the leading amateur theatrical companies in the district, and at the present moment are making a film in which they both have parts.

"It is still believed possible that Mrs. Evans has escaped the disaster, and it is hoped that by the time this appears in print news of both Mr. and Mrs. Evans will be to hand."

It was obvious to Hunt that the editor had sensed a mystery and hardly knew the best way to word the paragraph.

A few minutes later they turned in the drive and drew up at the house, a large modern residence situated just over the boundary of the town.

Although it stood in its own grounds, Hunt saw at once that Evans could not have kept his 'plane there, for the well-kept lawns, though spacious, were not half large enough to allow a safe landing, let alone a take-off.

The door was opened by Evans' butler-valet, a

man named Davis, who knew the Superintendent, and had seen his car approaching up the drive.

He had learned of the suspected murder of Sir Charles from the chauffeur who had attended the inquest, so, guessing some awkward questions would be asked, he immediately showed them into a small, well-furnished room overlooking the gardens, which was more secluded than the rest of the house.

This was the room that Evans used as his office. The walls were covered with many sporting prints and photographs. A typewriter and a telephone stood on a desk by the window, while down two sides of the room ran shelves of books, mostly dealing with sporting subjects. A couple of gun cases hung on the wall by the door, and near by, on the floor, was stretched the fine skin of a tiger that Evans had himself bagged.

A real man's room, thought Hunt, as he seated himself by the table in the centre.

The Superintendent opened the inquiry. "You may not have heard," he began, addressing Davis in a kindly tone, "but we have discovered that Sir Charles Stafford's death was not due to his accident, as we at first believed, but to a bullet wound in the head. In plain English, unless we are very much mistaken, we are investigating a case of murder.

"It is quite possible, Davis, that you will be able to help us considerably with our investigations, and I hope you will do your best to answer any questions that Inspector Hunt or the Chief Constable may put to you."

"Certainly, sir. I will do my best to help," answered Davis politely.

"Well, then, Inspector, perhaps you'd be good enough to carry on?" said the Superintendent, exchanging his seat on the corner of the table for one of the well-padded chairs.

"Take a seat, Davis, and make yourself comfortable," began Hunt, knowing the best way to get information of the kind he was after was by showing civility and tact.

"Now, to start with," he continued, "I don't know exactly what kind of life Mr. Evans leads. Has he an income, do you know, or is he in business?"

"Yes," replied Davis. "He has an income and he is also in business."

"Oh, both! I see. And where is his business situated? Is it local?"

"No, it's not local. It's in Town. The Stock Exchange, I believe—though I'm not sure about that," answered the valet.

"Does he go to Town every day?"

"No, not every day—never more than twice a week. Lately he hasn't been as much as that."

"No. How often has he been going lately, then?"

The valet thought for a moment. "Not more than a couple of times in the last month or six weeks."

"I see. Now—how long have you been with Mr. Evans?"

"Two years and a half, sir."

"He has only lived at Moorlands for about three years, I understand. Have you any idea where he lived before that?"

"No, I'm afraid I haven't, sir. I believe he used to travel a lot—mostly on the Continent."

"That doesn't help us much, I'm afraid. You

haven't noticed any change in Mr. Evans' manner lately, have you? For instance, has he seemed worried or upset in any way?"

The valet hesitated. "Now you mention it, sir, I have. Nothing very much, but he has seemed to be a little preoccupied—doesn't take any notice of a question one might ask him, and he is very nervous at times."

"How long ago was it when you first noticed this change?"

"About the time he stopped going to his office—a month or six weeks."

"Some business worry, probably. Now, about Mrs. Evans. I understand she was a qualified pilot?"

"Yes," the valet replied. "She has been flying now for some eighteen months."

"This is rather a personal question. I want you to think carefully before you answer. Has anything occurred to make you think Mr. and Mrs. Evans are not getting on so well together as they might?"

"No, nothing. Mr. Evans is devoted to her."

Hunt put a few more somewhat similar questions to him, but was unable to get the answer he desired. Then he brought Sir Charles Stafford's name into the conversation, but with still the same result. Both Mr. and Mrs. Evans were exceptionally friendly with him. No, there had never been any quarrel between them, he was sure.

Seeing that he would be unlikely to get any further information from the valet, he turned the conversation on to more general lines. He soon learned that the Evans household was made up of the valet,

housekeeper, cook, three maids, a gardener, and the chauffeur.

The aeroplane was kept on a farm some couple of miles away, the chauffeur, an ex-R.A.F. man, keeping it in order.

"I think I should like to see the housekeeper now. Will you go and ask her if she can spare us a few minutes?" asked Hunt, dismissing the valet.

Davis left the room, and the housekeeper, a rather stern-looking woman of about forty, was soon in the chair he had vacated.

Similar questions were asked—again with the same replies. She had, she told him, noticed a change come over Mr. Evans lately. He seemed to be lost in thought for hours on end. He would start too if the doorbell rang, or if any stranger came up the drive. She was sure he had something on his mind, and went about expecting something to happen.

No, she had no idea what his business was. Like the valet, she thought he was in some way connected with the Stock Exchange. He was devoted to his wife, she was sure.

The chauffeur was sent for next. He had no idea where Mr. Evans' office was situated. He would drop him at his club and pick him up there again later, generally the next afternoon.

Mrs. Evans never accompanied him to Town when he went on business. When they went on a shopping expedition, or for pleasure, they usually travelled by air.

Mrs. Evans was crazy on flying—caught the craze from Sir Charles Stafford, he thought.

Two of the maids who followed the chauffeur

could add little the trio did not already know. It seemed to Hunt that in suspecting either Mr. or Mrs. Evans he was definitely on the wrong track. From what he had heard, he gathered that they were an unusually happy young couple, blessed with an abundance of the world's riches. Mr. Evans' recent unnaturalness was, he thought, no doubt due to some business worry.

Then Dorothy Mills, Mrs. Evans' young maid, entered, and soon shattered Hunt's newly formed illusions, plunging him again into a maze of suspicion.

She was a pretty brunette, with laughing eyes, well-spoken, and completely at her ease. It seemed certain to Hunt she had seen better days.

Her room, she said, was directly over that of Mrs. Evans. Several times lately she had been disturbed by the sound of Mrs. Evans sobbing bitterly in the night.

"Oh!" said Hunt. "I'm sorry to hear that. Have you any idea what the trouble was?"

The girl looked at him for a moment. "I have an idea—but I don't think I ought to tell you! . . . Will you promise to keep it secret if I do?"

"Of course!" replied Hunt. "Anything you tell me—unless it has a bearing on the case and is used in evidence—will remain a secret."

The girl still looked a trifle dubious. "I don't see how it can come out in evidence, and, if you promise to keep it to yourself, I think I can tell you what is worrying both Mr. and Mrs. Evans," she said at length.

"I promise," said Hunt, with barely concealed

eagerness. "Now—just what is worrying Mr. and Mrs. Evans?"

"Well," the maid began, "the first time I heard Mrs. Evans crying would be about a month ago. I had not been feeling well, so I went to bed early. The sound woke me up—about midnight. Mr. Evans was in the room with her. He was talking—softly at first. Mrs. Evans' sobs continued. I couldn't hear what he was saying. Then all at once he raised his voice.

"'If we are ruined,' he said, 'you've only your extravagance to blame for it.' He spoke softly again for a while; then, later, I caught a bit more of the conversation. 'If I knew who'—then a name I couldn't catch—'was, I'd get him, even if I swung for it.' That was all I heard that night.

"About a week later he was talking again. It was a sultry night—we had a thunderstorm about 3 A.M.—and my bedroom window was wide open. I couldn't sleep and I was sitting in my dressing-gown looking out over the golf-course. The lightning was quite vivid, and I was wondering whether we should get the storm—we don't often here, you know. I'm frightened to death of thunder, and I was just thinking of going into cook's room next door when Mr. Evans crossed the floor below and opened the window.

"He only spoke a few words, but I caught them all. 'That's the only way, Peggy, I'm afraid,' he said. 'We'll go over to the States—and from there to somewhere where the law can't touch us. I may not be able to save much from the wreck, but what little I have by me will keep us going if we live quietly—anyhow, it's that or nothing.' As you

know, they were sailing to-day. That's all I can tell you, I'm afraid."

"Extraordinary. I can hardly believe it," put in Walker, when the maid had excused herself. "Young Evans bolting. It just shows you—one half of the world never guesses how the other half lives."

It was plain the Superintendent was shaken. His faith in the innocence of young Evans had known no bounds. "This alters the case considerably," he was bound to admit.

"Yes," replied the Chief Constable, "it does—and for the moment I must confess I fail to see what's to be done next."

"So do I. We're up against a deadlock," said Walker. "What do you suggest, Inspector?"

"I must agree that we seem to have come to a dead-end, but remember, we have made good progress. If we could only ascertain the nature of his business, I think we should also find the key to the mystery. It seems obvious to me that some rival has been ruining him. You'll remember he said, 'If I knew who somebody or other is, I'd get him, even if I swung for it.'"

"If he himself didn't know who his competitor was, we don't stand much chance of finding out, until, at least, we know his business."

"Quite," remarked the Chief Constable. "The next thing to do is to get on the track of this mysterious business. I say mysterious deliberately, because if no one in his house, not even his chauffeur, knew what or where his business was, it must be something that he doesn't want talked about."

"And add to that," suggested Walker, "the fact

that he talks about killing a rival, then it becomes easy to make more than a wild guess."

"Yes," answered the Chief Constable. "Members of the Stock Exchange certainly don't go about threatening to kill one another. It sounds more like dope trafficking or rum-running to me. What do you say, Inspector?"

"I certainly agree, sir, that your suspicions *may* prove to be well founded. But we are sure of nothing yet, and I think it's unwise to work out theories until we're certain they are being built on solid ground. To my mind, here we have a case of a man saying he is going to commit a murder. This same man is last seen flying off with a man who is afterwards found murdered in his aeroplane. We know of no cause of ill-feeling between the two men. But don't you agree that the best place to search for evidence of this ill-feeling is at the home of the murdered man?"

"He's right again, Superintendent. I shouldn't like to commit a murder and have him on my trail," said the Chief Constable, with unconcealed admiration.

They rose and passed out through the study door. In the hall a smartly-dressed, vivacious, but rather over-painted lady stood talking to the valet.

As soon as she saw the Superintendent she made over to him. "Isn't it terrible!" she began excitedly. "Poor Peggy, so young, so beautiful, to have come to such an end.

"And poor Sir Charles too. A blessing perhaps, though, in some ways. She would have died of grief in any case. So terribly in love with him,

you know. I never could understand it myself. Poor Dennis gave her everything she asked for to make her happy. Never a bit jealous or angry. Such a gentleman. I do hope nothing has happened to him. Where do you think he is, Superintendent?"

"I'm afraid I can't say, Mrs. Birch; it's a mystery to me. Allow me to introduce Major Williams, the Chief Constable; and Detective-Inspector Hunt of Scotland Yard."

"So delighted to meet you," she said to Hunt. "I'm really quite thrilled. It's the first time I've met a real detective. I was beginning to think they existed only in novels."

As she spoke, Hunt felt the Superintendent dig him in the back. "We must hurry, Inspector," he said. "We've a lot to do before dark."

Hunt took the hint, and, apologising to Mrs. Birch, who was preparing a long string of questions to fire at him, for his hurried departure, followed the Superintendent and Major Williams to the car.

Once up the drive and out of hearing, the Superintendent let fly. "Of all the insufferable bores and evil-tongued scandalmongers I've ever met, that woman takes the biscuit.

"My poor Peggy this, and my poor Peggy that, when all the time she hates her like poison. Why, Mrs. Evans even forbade her the house a short time ago. She'd turn in her grave, I'm certain, were she to know that Davis had let that woman in.

"I forget exactly how the climax came, but I know what the trouble was over. Young Evans told me himself. It appears she was making a dead set at him, and, when she failed to capture his affections,

did all she could to make trouble between him and his wife. Definitely an undesirable sort of woman. Her husband left her long ago—I don't blame him, poor devil."

"I've met the type myself, Superintendent," commented the Chief Constable, "though luckily they're few and far between."

"And I too," added Hunt, "but, as much as I despise them, I never allow myself to overlook the fact that even they sometimes speak the truth."

VII

THE CUT TIRE MYSTERY

THE long spring evening was drawing to a close when the Superintendent's car drew up outside Sir Charles Stafford's lovely residence on the edge of the New Forest.

Hunt, who had never before visited Lymington, enjoyed every moment of the drive, and was almost sorry when at last he had to drag his tired body from the luxurious, well-sprung upholstery of Walker's car. But, tired as he was, he roused himself quickly at the sight of another car, a Rolls-Royce, standing outside the front door.

"Mr. Day, for a fiver," he said aloud. "I wonder if he'll have anything to tell us?"

His surmise was quite correct. Mr. Day was in the hall talking to the butler.

Directly he saw the Superintendent he hurried over to him. Hunt could see he was flushed and excited, and, he thought, looked not altogether sober.

"Oh, Superintendent!" he began, in a rather loud, excited manner. "I'm so glad you've come. You'll never guess what's happened.

"You know I was supposed to be staying here last night? I didn't though, of course, but that doesn't matter—at least, not a lot, only if I had I should have found out sooner.

"I must have changed suit-cases with Mrs. Evans

—when it happened I can't say. Anyhow, it *did* happen. Imagine my surprise, Superintendent, when I opened my bag—or should I say what I took to be *my* bag—this morning? What *do* you think it contained?"

The Superintendent seemed a bit dazed by this torrent of words, and repeated the question aloud. "What should I expect to find if I opened a lady's suit-case? Why—some of her clothes, I expect. Maybe even some underclothes," he added gravely.

"Just so, Superintendent, so should I, and if I had I should have said nothing, but returned it quietly to her house. But I didn't—that's the funny part.

"There were no clothes. None at all. Nothing—not even a toothbrush! No nothing—nothing but money!

"Stacks of money—all notes—hundreds of 'em—no, thousands—and all five-pound notes."

"Where are they?" asked Hunt quickly. "Have you them with you?"

"Yes," replied Day. "Of course I have. I've brought them back here where I found them. Sturman has helped me to put them in the safe. They'll be safe there, whose ever they are."

"Well, if this isn't the limit," remarked the Chief Constable to Walker, in an undertone. "But for this drunken fool all this money would have been lost for ever. It seems to me that young Evans has managed to save a considerable amount from the wreck after all."

They followed Hunt and Day to a massive safe let into the wall of Sir Charles' study. Sturman

knew the combination; he kept the silver there, he explained.

He dialled the letters C.H.A.L.Y.M., turned the key, and the heavy door swung open. The Inspector reached for the suit-case, a neat blue expanding one, with the initials P.E., painted in black letters on the front. Carrying it over to the table, he unlocked it with Day's key.

It was filled, as Day had said, with five-pound notes, pile upon pile, bound with elastic—and all apparently genuine.

He set to work to count them roughly. The piles all seemed to contain an equal number. He counted one quickly. A thousand notes—£5,000.

Quickly he counted the bundles. There were fifty. "Strewth!" he exclaimed. . . . "Fifty times five thousand—a fortune. Two hundred and fifty thousand. A quarter of a million."

He glanced at some of the numbers. To his surprise, few of them were consecutive. A quarter of a million of untraceable money!

"'And we shall have to live very quietly.' Good Lord! How could he have called himself ruined with this lot?"

"I say, Superintendent, we can't leave all this here. You must take it to the station and lock it away until to-morrow and then bank it. My Goodness! I've never handled a case with so many staggering surprises."

The others were equally astounded.

The Chief Constable grasped the table for support, while Sturman seemed totally unable to keep

his bulging eyes away from the table, however hard he tried to preserve his usual dignified manner.

Day, who had had all this wealth in his hands, seemed equally shaken by the disclosures. He had hurriedly returned it to the house without thought, too drunk, or too startled, to trouble to count it. What a chance he had missed! The money untraceable, and the owner of it, in all probability, dead. Rich though he already was, the desire to accumulate more was still strong within him.

Hunt could guess from his downfallen countenance what was passing through the man's mind. Little wonder too, for the temptation to any man to say nothing, had he known just how much the case contained, would have been almost overwhelmingly strong, and the chance of detection practically nil. Even if Evans had afterwards turned up and claimed the money, Day could have pretended he had not yet unpacked the suit-case and discovered his mistake.

The unhappy-looking man soon left the room, presumably to seek solace in liquid refreshment.

"Well, this certainly does confirm the maid's story, Inspector," commenced the Chief Constable, "but otherwise it doesn't get us any nearer our goal."

"No, sir, it doesn't," Hunt replied. "We'd better put this back in the safe for a time and continue our inquiries. I suggest we see what Sturman can tell us first."

"As you like, Inspector," assented Major Williams.

To begin with, Hunt let the butler tell of how he obtained his post and of what little he knew of Sir Charles' earlier life in his own way. But Sturman

was unable to divulge anything Hunt did not already know.

Seeing that this method was a waste of time, and looked like serving no useful purpose, Hunt began to question him directly.

"Yes, Sturman," he said pleasantly, "that's all very clear, but unfortunately we know it all already. Now let me ask you a few questions. Firstly, what becomes of the title and estates now Sir Charles is dead?"

"Oh!" replied the butler, "Sir Charles has a cousin—a gentleman named Henry Sandleson. I believe he is Sir Charles' next of kin. He has been here once or twice, but, to tell the truth, Sir Charles did not get on with him at all well. In fact, the last time he was here Sir Charles ordered me to show him out. That was six months ago. He hasn't been here since. I rather fancy, from what Sir Charles said at the time, he is a ne'er-do-well."

"Have you any idea what they quarrelled about?"

"Yes—as a matter of fact, Sir Charles told me afterwards. He was demanding money. I had strict orders that I was not to allow him to enter should he ever turn up again."

"Well, it will be different now. I suppose he has succeeded to the title and estates," commented Hunt. "He'll put in an appearance pretty soon, I expect, unless he's out of the country. Now, you say Sir Charles had a large income. Was he not also in business?"

"No. He was on the board of several aviation companies, that was all. He seldom went to Town."

"More of a figurehead, you mean, than an active director?"

"Yes, that's right. It was an asset to any firm to get his name on their letter-heads."

"I see." Then—"Did Mr. and Mrs. Evans often visit him?"

"Oh, yes! They were great friends. They came over several times a week. Mrs. Evans especially. She used to golf a good deal with Sir Charles."

"Oh . . . now . . . do you happen to know where Sir Charles lived before he came to Forest Court?"

"Yes. He used to live at Harrow. I believe Mrs. Evans came from somewhere near that district. I understand that was where she first met Sir Charles. She was unmarried then, of course."

"Was she— How long has she been married?"

"Just over three years, I believe. Sir Charles was best man at the wedding. I can show you a photograph of the couple leaving the church—of course, this was all before my time, but Mrs. Allen, Sir Charles' old nurse, told me this before she died. She was with him all his life—or, I should say, with the family. Sir Charles lived with an uncle, who has since died, when he first came to England. This Mrs. Allen stayed on as housekeeper when Sir Charles went to school. After his uncle died, Sir Charles had old Mrs. Allen here—pensioned her off, as it were, till she died."

Hunt thought for a moment. "Have you any idea if Sir Charles and Mrs. Evans quarrelled recently?" he asked.

"Quarrelled? No, I should think not. They were the best of friends."

"You must have seen a lot of Mr. and Mrs. Evans together. Did they always strike you as being a happy couple?"

"Yes, always. I feel sure they were."

Hunt tried several more questions, but was unable to extract any further information. That he had obtained had been given freely, and he had no reason to suspect the man of withholding anything important.

Next he intimated that he wanted to go from the study to the hangar where Sturman had last seen Sir Charles alive.

It was quite a short walk—down a passage and through a door set in the wall at the end.

The hangar was a spacious building, large enough to hold three or four 'planes at the same time. A fast single-seater of the fighting type was its sole occupant.

"A design of Sir Charles'," remarked the butler, noticing the Chief Constable seemed interested in it. "It has a very low landing speed coupled with a remarkable performance. Sir Charles intended to place it on the market shortly."

There was obviously nothing there that would help in the solving of the crimes, so Hunt passed on through an open door into the garage. Two cars stood there—the Rover and a sports Bugatti.

"Are these the only cars Sir Charles possessed?" asked Hunt.

"Oh, no," replied the butler. "There's a Bentley too."

"A Bentley too. Where's that kept?"

"In here usually—but just now it's up in the repair shop."

"And where's the repair shop?"

"Over by Bailey's house—across the park by the lake."

"We're just going over there, so I can satisfy my curiosity then. Which is our quickest way—round this path or back through the hangar?"

"There's not much in it. They're both about the same. Ah! Here comes young Jim, the under-chauffeur—he'll show you across."

A pleasant-looking youth of some eighteen summers came up to them. He had overheard Sturman's remarks, and was, in fact, on his way over to the workshop himself.

The three set out, and during the three-quarters of a mile walk across the park Hunt was engaged in animated conversation with Jim Hucklesby. He learned that Jim was an enthusiastic motorcyclist, who was busy at the moment putting the finishing touches to a machine Sir Charles had entered for him to ride in the Tourist Trophy race in the Isle of Man next month.

He was full of praise for Sir Charles, who, he said, was a thorough sportsman, and seemed deeply shocked by the tragedy. He could not, however, add any information to that the Inspector had already gathered.

He had only been with Sir Charles a few months. The story of how he obtained his post was quite interesting.

Sir Charles was president of a local motor-cycle

club, and had presented the prizes at one of the monthly grass track meetings, when Jim had carried off the majority of events. Recognising Jim as a resident of Lymington, he had afterwards stopped and chatted whenever they met.

Then, when the garage Jim was employed at had closed down, he had taken him on as under-chauffeur. Sir Charles soon discovered that in Jim he had an exceptionally fine driver, and did all he could to help him realise his ambition to win the Senior Tourist Trophy.

And Jim assured Hunt that he meant to make the most of his chance and ride as never before.

By this time they had come up to the landing-light that had given trouble early that morning. Jim explained that, although he had spent some time in examining it, he had been unable to find any defect. It seemed to function perfectly.

He said that the current for this lamp was generated over by the repair shop, a hundred yards or so away. Sir Charles had decided it would be more satisfactory to generate the current for this part of the estate separately than to run a cable across from the house plant.

Hunt found the switch and pulled it down. Instantly a powerful shaft of light shot across the darkened park. He left it on for some little time, but was not rewarded with a flicker. Evidently all was in order now.

The little group continued towards the block of buildings. The hitherto broad, level park gave way here to a little plantation of fir-trees on either side of the now narrow strip of rather tufty grass.

It seemed probable to Hunt that this was where the 'planes had started their rush across the park. He was right again in his surmise, as he afterwards learned.

A few more paces, then Jim announced that the first building was the repair shop. He produced his keys, and, after unlocking the door, switched on the light.

The place, large enough to hold three cars, was in spotless condition. A well-equipped bench ran down one side, while across the bottom stood the lathes and drills, driven, Hunt could see, by a small electric motor. Just inside the door stood a couple of motor-cycles—one, a specially-built, stripped grass-track racing machine, and the other one of the newest of road-racers.

But Hunt was not, at the moment, interested in these. His eyes were all for the Bentley.

It stood in the centre of the shed, facing the door, over an open pit, and he saw at once that it was fitted with Firestone tires.

Moving over to the car, he quickly examined the near-side front one. The V-shaped cut he was looking for did not appear to be there.

Releasing the brake, he pushed the car forward a pace. This time his examination yielded the result he hoped for. Whoever had left the car there had, either by accident or design, stopped the wheel with the cut hidden by the ground.

He nodded to the others, warning them with his finger to his lips to say nothing in front of Jim.

But Jim had not noticed the inspection of the tire, being busily engaged in fitting some little gadget he

had brought from the house to his stripped machine. So absorbed was he in his task that he, although nearer to the door than the others, did not, in common with them, notice the face of the mechanic Bailey peering at them from the darkness without.

"I think the next move is to have a little chat with Bailey, don't you, sir?" remarked Hunt to the Chief Constable.

His mind was going back to that afternoon at the inquest when the mechanic had shown so much uneasiness. At the time he had put it down as being due to the strangeness of the surroundings, but he began to think differently.

As he spoke he did not know that Bailey himself had heard the words, and was now doubling back to his house to regain, if possible, a little of his composure before the ordeal began.

"Yes," the Chief Constable replied. "I think so too. I noticed a light in what I took to be his house as we were coming over, so I think we shall catch him in."

Jim followed them to the door. "You can't miss his place," he said, "so there's no need for me to come. It's the next building but one."

Bailey himself answered Hunt's knock, and, showing surprise as though seeing them for the first time that night, asked them in.

The little room was cosy, well furnished, and scrupulously clean. Hunt put his hat on the table and curtly refused the proffered seat. Bailey did not seem as nervous now as he did at the inquest. Now that the crisis had come, fear had lent him courage enough to make an attempt to bluff the situation.

To Hunt's mind this little man did not seem to look the part of a murderer. But he knew from experience that it was impossible to tell by looks alone. Many a little man had paid the supreme penalty.

He decided to come straight to the point. "Now, Bailey," he said in a voice that rang with authority, "I want the true account of your movements between three o'clock this morning and the time when Sturman called you to the 'phone with the news of the disaster."

"The true account?" echoed Bailey with well-feigned surprise. "Why, I gave it at the inquest. After I put out the landing-light I came straight in here and went to bed."

"Look here, my man, I tell you candidly that tale no longer holds water. You were seen to leave here in the Bentley just after the 'planes had left," bluffed Hunt.

Bailey seemed relieved. A ghost of a smile played across his lips. "If that's all you have against me, sir," he said, "I can soon prove to you that your information is incorrect."

He spoke with conviction and, they thought, spoke the truth.

"And how," queried Hunt in a little less commanding manner, "can you prove that my information is incorrect?"

"Easily. The Bentley was taken away yesterday afternoon and not brought back until this morning!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Hunt, astounded. "Who took it away, and to where was it taken?"

"Jim Hucklesby took it away to Hendon—to the makers—to get a new camshaft. You see, it's a special job, and standard spares won't fit."

VIII

THE ARREST

"JIM HUCKLESBY?" echoed Hunt. "And he was away with it, you say, all night?"

"Yes, sir; at least, he didn't bring it back here until this morning. I understand from what he told me, though, that he got back to Lymington just before midnight, and left it in his father's garage. His father, of course, keeps a public house on the other side of the town."

"This complicates matters a lot," said Hunt to the Chief Constable. "We must see Hucklesby again at once. I feel certain, though, that he's not mixed up in this business himself, but it may have been possible for someone to have borrowed the car without his knowledge."

Picking up his hat, he made for the door. "You're not going to bed for a few minutes, Bailey, are you?" he asked. "I may want your help again."

"No, sir," replied the mechanic. "I shall be up for an hour or more yet. I usually keep the wireless on until late."

Hunt, followed by the Superintendent and Major Williams, hurried from the house. To his surprise, the light in the garage had been turned off. Going up to the door, he found that it was locked. It was obvious that Jim had gone.

"Curse it!" said Hunt, half to himself. "We

ought to have asked him to wait. It'll probably take us half the night to find him again."

Just then the strains of the "Indian Love Call," from *Rose Marie*, came floating across the park.

"That's probably him whistling," observed the Superintendent, "and, if so, he's a good half way across to the house."

"Wait," shouted Hunt. "I know how I can attract his attention."

He sprinted off in the direction of the landing-light. The others followed at a more leisurely pace.

Reaching the light, Hunt switched it on. It was fitted with a swivel, and almost immediately the beam picked Hucklesby up. A few signals and the lad, guessing he was wanted, began to retrace his footsteps.

The trio went part of the way to meet him, leaving the light on and walking down its ray.

"I didn't realise you were going so soon," began Hunt, "and I've one or two important questions to ask you. To start off with, I'll tell you I'm trying to trace the movements of the Bentley, and I want you to tell me whether you think anyone could have borrowed it after you put it away in your father's garage last night?"

"My father's garage?" repeated the lad, as though unable to grasp the Yard man's meaning. "Who told you I put it in my father's garage?"

"Never mind that. Do you think anyone could have borrowed it without your knowledge?"

But Hucklesby cut him short. "You're on the wrong track, Inspector, I'm afraid. I haven't got

a father at all—much less a father with a garage. Did Bailey tell you that yarn?"

"Haven't got a father?" cried the Chief Constable, momentarily forgetful of his grammar. "Bailey's called your bluff all right, Inspector, and sent us all on a wild goose chase. If we don't get back instantly, he'll get away—if he's not already done so."

They started back towards the mechanic's house.

"Yes, sir," replied Hunt, "he bluffed me badly, and by now, no doubt, he's miles away."

Hardly had he uttered the words when a car engine woke to life with a roar. From the darkness of the distant sheds shot the glare of powerful headlights. Across the park towards them came the Bentley, accelerating rapidly. A moment more and it had passed them, a good hundred yards to their left, travelling at quite seventy miles an hour.

"Well, that's that!" said Hunt angrily. "He's tricked us properly. The next thing to do is to go back to the house and 'phone, but by the time the police are warned he'll be miles away. And to think I could have sworn that he was not a murderer!"

"Why don't you 'phone from Bailey's house?" advised Jim, thoroughly thrilled by his experience. "It'll save you quite ten minutes."

"That's a good idea, Jim. I will. Let's sprint."

The Chief Constable and Superintendent did not see how any sprinting on their part would help matters, so followed in a more dignified manner.

In a short time Hunt and young Jim arrived at the mechanic's house. The door, they found to their surprise, was locked. However, under their combined weight it soon flew open.

"The 'phone's in his bedroom," announced Huckleby, rushing up the stairs.

Hunt picked up the instrument hurriedly. He could tell at once the line was dead. Glancing down, he saw the trouble. The line was cut in two places.

Jim came to the rescue again. "I'll run you down to the house on my motor-cycle. It'll bump a bit—there's no carrier—but I've a little air-cushion on the back mudguard, and a pair of pillion rests."

"Fine," answered Hunt. "I'll endure the bumping."

A few moments later they were again in the repair shop. The machine was, luckily, not quite ready for the races, and so was still equipped with electric lights.

A short push and the well-tuned engine jumped to life. Hunt clambered into position behind the under-chauffeur, and they were off.

Their speed increased rapidly, sixty—seventy—nearly eighty, then in an incredibly short space of time they were braking for the house. Almost before they came to a standstill, Hunt was off, flying up the steps to the front door. He tried it—it opened—and in he rushed without knocking.

The 'phone was in the hall. Taking off the receiver, he impatiently awaited the exchange to answer. But no answer came—the line seemed dead. He examined the instrument quickly. It had not been tampered with. "Cut outside, no doubt," he thought, replacing the receiver on its hook.

Jim was still waiting outside. One of the gardeners stood with him. This man had seen the hurried

departure of the mechanic, and had noticed he took the Bournemouth road.

"Where can we 'phone from?" asked Hunt as he came up. "He's cut this wire too."

"There's a 'phone-box in Lymington, sir," volunteered Jim. "Jump on—we'll soon be there."

Hunt helped to start the machine again, leaping on to his seat as the engine fired.

The speed at which Jim covered the few miles to Lymington convinced Hunt that the lad was a marvellous driver. Trusting that the road ahead was clear, he had approached, and sometimes taken, many of the really nasty corners at a speed of well over a mile a minute. Luckily no traffic was on the road or disaster must have overtaken them.

Hunt had not ridden a motor-cycle for years, and as the powerful machine raced along, banking and braking for corners, and getting away again with flashing acceleration, he realised that the possession of one provided the lucky owner who defied the law and opened wide the throttle with more thrills than any racing car or aeroplane.

Again, in an almost unbelievable space of time, they reached their destination; pulling up at a telephone-box in a long, controlled skid.

This time Hunt had better luck, getting through immediately to the police station, where the sergeant in charge took down the C.I.D. man's brief description of Bailey and the car—which, before many minutes had elapsed, was circulating to all stations in the southern part of the country.

Going back to the machine again, he noticed that their hectic arrival had attracted the attention of a

patrolling constable, who stood questioning Jim at some length.

Hunt produced his card and the policeman, who had seemed a little sceptical of Jim's story, became all politeness.

Yes, a Bentley had passed some five minutes before—travelling at a furious pace. Yes, it was still on the Bournemouth road.

"Let's try to catch him," suggested Jim, now really worked up by the thrill of the hunt. "We can, you know, sir. We'll beat him on the corners."

Hunt, too, felt the fever of the chase. "Let's try," he answered rashly.

The constable gave them a push, and a ride that Detective-Inspector Hunt was to remember all his life began.

The winding road to Highcliffe was covered at an even faster rate than that they had been travelling at previously. They thundered through the little village, bringing people wrathfully to their windows from their beds.

A constable sprang from out of a doorway at the Bournemouth end of the narrow street, waving his light and shouting. But for all the good he did he might just as well have saved himself the trouble, for Jim paid him no attention, but tore on the faster. His speed, as he braked hard for the turn a little distance beyond the village, was over ninety miles per hour.

Just before reaching Totland Corner, the scene of the murder of Constable James, a rabbit, dazed by the headlight, dodged across in front of them. They hit it fair and square with the front wheel, but,

luckily for them, its body was flung clear, and they were not thrown off.

Not in the least perturbed by this narrow escape, Jim kept the throttle open. Soon they came to the junction of the Lymington and London-Bournemouth roads. A policeman was standing on the strip of grass on the corner nearest Bournemouth. Pulling up for a moment, they learned that the Bentley had turned, not three minutes before, towards London. The policeman had tried to stop it, but in vain. He had received a 'phone call from Lymington just as the car approached.

Off again; this time on the long straights through the Forest towards Lyndhurst. They would not gain much here. The Bentley would do an easy one hundred and twenty miles per hour, and, even if they whacked up one hundred and ten miles per hour, Jim doubted whether the Inspector would be able to stand the terrific bumping.

But, to Hunt's own surprise, he was able to keep his seat; and consequently the maximum speed of the motor-cycle was reached on many of the straights.

Lyndhurst at last. Another policeman in the street. They pulled up hurriedly. Yes, the Bentley had just passed. Not so much ahead either—less than two minutes now. He had not taken the Southampton road, but turned left for Romsey.

"Making for Town," yelled Jim. "Suppose he thought the level crossing gates on the Lyndhurst-Southampton road might be shut. We'll catch him now—he'll find this road too twisty."

Jim's optimism proved not unfounded. Three minutes later the lights of the Bentley could be seen

a mile or so ahead. His quarry in sight, Jim took more risks than ever. There was traffic on the road now—heavy lorries bringing produce from London to the coastal towns. They flashed by them, flat out, gone long before the drivers' curses could reach their ears.

Bailey was going a little slower now. He had no idea that he was being pursued. Five minutes later the motor-cycle was close enough for its light to reflect on the Bentley's windscreen. It was then the mechanic realised the chase was on.

With a frightened oath he banged down the accelerator, and the big car, responding, leaped forward.

He had left it too late, though; the twisty road did not permit him to use his superior speed to advantage, and, foot by foot, the motor-cycle drew closer.

The man was desperate now. He was cornering almost as fast as Jim. But it was obvious that he could not keep it up. Again and again he only escaped disaster by a miracle. Less than a hundred yards now separated pursuer and pursued. They were entering the narrow, twisty streets of Romsey. The police here had received the news, and had started to erect a flimsy barrier. The Bentley, however, took it in its stride, scattering the policemen in all directions. But the incident caused Bailey to miss his turn. Now he was on a loose-surfaced, unfamiliar road—with the roaring motor-cycle but fifty yards behind.

Two miles farther on stood the little village of Houghton. It was approached from Romsey by a straight and level half-mile stretch of road, followed by an S bend.

The Bentley had careered madly down the straight at over a hundred miles per hour; while the motorcycle, owing to the bumpy state of the road, had fallen some hundred yards behind.

Elated by the discovery that he was shaking off his pursuers, Bailey left his braking for the bend a fraction of a second too late.

In a hectic skid the Bentley struck the bank at the apex of the first bend of the S, wrenching the off-side rear tire clean from the wheel. By a super-human effort Bailey righted the car for a moment, only to lose control again almost instantly as he skidded madly on the second bend of the S.

This time luck did not favour the mechanic. Still moving at well over a mile a minute, the Bentley charged a low brick wall. The wall held, but the car doubled up like a concertina.

This abrupt termination of his forward motion caused Bailey to be flung from his seat and catapulted high into the air.

Either nature or an earlier generation of villagers had luckily decided that the spot he was heading for was ideal for a really deep pond. This decision alone undoubtedly allowed the delivery of a live man to justice.

Skilfully avoiding the wrecked car, which almost blocked the narrow road, Jim brought his machine to a standstill only a few paces beyond it.

Hunt hurriedly scaled the wall, over which he had seen the wanted man disappearing, and saw him, partly stunned and half-drowned, struggling in the water.

With Jim's help he dragged him ashore. After a

few minutes the fugitive had recovered sufficiently to realise what had happened to him. He did not seem surprised to find the handcuffs on his wrists.

"I shall detain you on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of Constable James some time between the hours of three and six-thirty this morning in Redstock Lane, and it is my duty to caution you that anything you say will be taken down and may be used in evidence against you," warned Hunt, addressing the terror-stricken man.

"I don't mind how much you caution me," whimpered the mechanic. "You can't prove I used the car."

Hunt would not have answered the prisoner, for he knew he spoke the truth, but Jim overheard the remark and supplied the evidence the Yard man needed.

"Oh, yes, you can, sir," he started. "I saw him myself. At four o'clock this morning I went across to get my motor-bike out of the repair shop. You see, as I told you, I'm practising hard for the races, and I go out almost every morning at daybreak and try to cover a hundred miles or so in as many minutes.

"Just as I got to the shed I heard a car coming up the lane by the side of the landing-ground. It had no lights on, though it was hardly daylight. I wondered who it could be at that time of morning, so I hid myself round the corner of the shed to find out what was going on. The car—it was the Bentley—came up to the front of the repair shop and stopped. I saw Bailey get out and swing back the

double doors. Then, getting in the car again, he ran it into the shop.

"I didn't want him to think I had been spying on him, so I waited some little time before going in and getting my bike. I felt the radiator of the Bentley as I passed and found it was quite hot. I could tell the car had been driven some distance, and, I thought, driven hard. I noticed later in the day that the car had been turned round and placed over the pit."

"Thank you, Jim," Hunt said with a smile. "I must take that statement down in writing and get you to sign it. I think that completes the case." Then, sternly: "Now, Bailey, unless you can explain your movements with the car to my satisfaction, I have no option but to charge you with the murder."

"I *can* explain, Inspector, but I won't. You must do your worst," he added defiantly.

IX

ANOTHER BODY

THE noise of the smash had aroused the village constable, whose house was not far from the scene of the accident. He had hurriedly dressed and proceeded in the direction from which the sound had come, arriving just as Hunt was deciding to knock someone up and borrow his car to convey his prisoner to the police station.

It turned out, however, that the constable had recently come into a little money and possessed an old Morris Cowley, which was in good going order despite its rather battered appearance. He was also on the 'phone.

The party set off to his house with the mechanic, who seemed now to be resigned to his fate.

Once at the house, Hunt 'phoned the news of the dramatic arrest through to Lymington, asking the sergeant, who answered the 'phone again, to send a constable to tell the Chief Constable and Superintendent Walker that they were taking their man to Bournemouth by road.

Jim arranged to leave his motor-cycle at the policeman's house and call for it when he returned the car on the morrow.

The old Morris had quite a turn of speed, so the return journey did not take them much above twice the time the outward trip had done.

The Chief Constable and Walker were already at the police station, and both seemed extremely thankful that such an early arrest in what seemed at first so difficult a case had been effected.

The prisoner was immediately charged; he made no reply, and was escorted to the cells.

After arranging to meet the Chief Constable in the morning, Hunt set off to Southbourne with Jim, who had offered to drop him at his sister's house before continuing his journey back to Lymington.

And so, after a hearty supper, the Inspector, fagged in body and mind, went to bed.

He had arranged to have breakfast at 7.30 the next morning, and, although he had not had very long in bed, he was down before the clock struck the half-hour, looking and feeling as fresh as ever.

He was not due at the station to help the Chief Constable prepare the case against Bailey until ten o'clock, so he decided to run out to Totland Corner in his car to examine a little more closely the meadow in which the detective had found the mysterious footprints.

He was still not satisfied that these prints were unconnected with the crime—although just what part they played he was quite unable to decide.

Neither had he yet dismissed the still missing Evans from the case. It seemed highly probable to him that Bailey had an accomplice; the words, "*I can explain, but I won't,*" rather suggested that he was shielding someone. Even now, though he had himself arrested the man, he felt that Bailey had not fired the fatal shots, although he undoubtedly had been there and knew exactly what had happened.

The fact that the mechanic was deeply involved rendered his account of the start to the fatal flight as highly improbable, and evidence to be regarded with suspicion. Until it was possible to make him give the true account, Hunt felt that the key to the mystery would be unobtainable. That Bailey would turn King's evidence eventually he had no doubts. His type invariably did; but it was possible that he would withhold his information until the actual murderer got clear away.

His little car was very powerful, capable of a good seventy-five miles an hour, so he was able to make short work of the trip. Sad to relate, he was seldom able to keep to the speed the law demands must not be exceeded.

Reaching the Corner, he turned his car into Redstock Lane, parking it near the scene of the crime.

He thought it very probable that the murder of Sir Charles had taken place here too. In spite of the dangers of a night landing, he felt certain one had been carried out. He felt equally sure that both murders had been committed by the same person using the same weapon.

Leaving the car, he climbed the hedge into Angels. It was a beautiful morning, little wind, with a clear blue sky that gave promise of hours of warm sunshine.

Deep in thought, he walked down by the low hedge until he came to the gate by the main road.

Leaning with his back up against it, he looked up the meadow towards the marshy patch. The cows had been in the meadow again overnight, he noticed. "Rather a pity," he thought; "there's little hope now

of finding marks where the 'planes may have landed, even if they had been there previously."

The meadow, he reflected, was ideal for landing purposes. If only he could see a way to get over the snag of a landing by night on strange ground, and without landing-lights, he felt convinced he would be able to solve the crimes in their entirety.

Then suddenly, as he looked up the field, he saw how it could have been done. The mistake he had made had been in thinking Bailey had been at Lymington when the 'planes took off.

Supposing Bailey had switched on the landing-light at a quarter to three—or even earlier; then, instead of waiting to see the 'planes start, had hurried here with the Bentley.

With a quarter of an hour or so's start, he would have been at Totland Corner well before the 'planes.

There would have been little fear of traffic at that time of the morning, and he could safely have manoeuvred his car across the road until his lights, which were extremely powerful, were shining through the gateway and lighting up the meadow as effectively as any landing-light of the type Sir Charles used.

The Inspector decided to attempt to reconstruct the crime. He fetched his car from the lane, and, after propping the gate wide open, he drove it into a position similar to that in which he believed Bailey had placed the Bentley.

He carried a small pocket compass with him whenever he did any motoring. Producing this from the pocket of his car and placing it on the running-board—the most convenient level surface—he dis-

covered that the nose of the car was pointing in a north-easterly direction.

This was what he had expected to find. His knowledge of flying, though little less scanty than that of the average man in the street, was sufficient to tell him a 'plane normally landed against the wind.

The wind that fateful night, or, to be exact, that early morning, was, he remembered, blowing from a south-westerly direction.

As the 'planes would also, almost certainly, land against the light, to avoid shadows, he felt that his theory that this gateway was the one used was considerably strengthened by his discovery with the compass.

The tracks of the car in the gateway would have been wiped out completely by the cows when they passed through in the morning. That fact alone convinced Hunt that the crime had been planned with the utmost caution.

One thing was clear now that had been a mystery before—the unidentified tracks that started so suddenly in the middle of the meadow were made by a man getting out of an aeroplane.

He decided to walk over to the spot where these began to see if he could gain further knowledge there. But, after having progressed so far with the reconstruction, Hunt found himself nonplussed almost at once by a simple fact that he had overlooked.

There was only one set of tracks.

Try as he could, the Inspector was unable to fit this single set into his theories. Even assuming that Evans had, by some pretext, arranged for them to land in this meadow, and, after landing, had climbed

out of his 'plane, walked over to Sir Charles, and fired the fatal shot, there was the insurmountable snag of there being no return footprints to the starting-point.

Obviously he *had* gone back, as the monoplane had passed over the Head later.

But, in spite of this disappointment, Hunt felt sure he was on the right track. He knew it would be possible to send up the "Moth" without a pilot—with the controls in a central position and the engine running on full throttle it would float gently skywards as soon as it reached a high enough speed to leave the ground.

He decided to go back to Bournemouth to see if the Chief Constable could suggest any way out of the difficulty. He had hardly turned, though, to begin to retrace his footsteps to the car when someone hailed him from behind.

Turning again, he saw Mr. Abbot, of the Home Farm, waving and shouting for him to stop. Wondering what the excitement could be about, he went part of the way to meet him.

Although the farmer was clearly excited, he did not impart his news until he had shaken hands with the Inspector and bid him a hearty good morning. Then he came quickly to the point.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Inspector," he said, "but I've just found another dead man on my farm."

"Another dead man!" echoed Hunt. "This place will soon have quite an unsavoury reputation, I'm afraid."

"Yes," answered the farmer. "It certainly will—but I don't think this will be a case for Scotland

Yard. It's a man of the tramp class, and I should say a case of natural death—but whilst you're here, Inspector, I thought you'd like to take a look round."

He led the way up into the far corner of the meadow to the gate where Hunt had expected, during his search on the day before, to find traces of the unidentified footprints.

After climbing the gate, Abbot led him through some gorse and furze-bushes to a little tin shelter, where the cattle were wont to lie in bad weather. The Inspector had noticed the building the morning before, but had not troubled to examine it.

In the far corner of this shed Hunt saw the body of a rough-looking, unshaven man. He bent down and touched the still form; it was cold and stiff. No doubt death had taken place hours, or even days, previously.

The man's head was on a bundle, of the type tramps carry, and the body was fully clothed, except for the badly cracked boots, which stood side by side near at hand.

As Hunt gazed at the face, set quite calm and peaceful in death, he had a feeling that he had seen the man before. He tried hard to place him for some minutes—but in vain.

Abbot noticed the Inspector was closely scrutinising the dead body, and volunteered the information at his disposal. "He's been about the place some days, Inspector, I believe," he commenced, "though he's a total stranger to me.

"My wife told me she had a tramp call a day or two ago to beg a stamp and an envelope. Her description of him fits this man exactly. She was very

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puzzled to get such an unusual request as this, but, as he seemed a well-spoken man who had undoubtedly seen better days, she gave him what he asked. She said he had a hunted, furtive look about him, and she wondered if he was in trouble with the police."

As the farmer concluded, the scene of his previous meeting with the dead man came vividly into Hunt's mind.

He remembered now that he was at the Old Bailey, waiting to give evidence in a forgery case. He had arrived a little early, and the case previous to the one he was connected with had not quite finished.

The prisoner, Alfred Newton, stood charged with the crimes of blackmail and robbery with violence.

The jury filed back to their box. The foreman returned a verdict of guilty. In vain the accused protested his innocence. The judge, addressing him in scathing tones, passed sentence of seven years' penal servitude.

The case had interested Hunt at the time, and he remembered reading it up when he got home that evening. He had no doubts whatever—the accused had been justly convicted.

He remembered, too, the escape of Alfred Newton from Parkhurst Prison, Isle of Wight—how he had eluded his warders in a fog and got clear off the island. It had been a nine days' wonder, and, truth to tell, the authorities had quite given him up for lost. . . . And all this time he had apparently been wandering about quite openly. Just another instance of a wanted man mixing unconcernedly with

his fellow-creatures without unduly raising their suspicions.

"Your wife was right then, Mr. Abbot. He *was* in trouble with the police. I remember now. This is Alfred Newton, the convict who escaped from Parkhurst Prison last March," announced Hunt at length.

"I suppose we'd better 'phone up the police station for the doctor—and I expect we shall have to attend still another inquest."

As they turned to leave the hut, Hunt remembered the mysterious footprint. Crossing again to the body, he picked up the well-worn boots.

He saw at a glance that they were not the pair he was longing to set eyes on. No—these were quite two sizes too small!

X

SIR HENRY DISAPPEARS

THE Chief Constable had most conscientiously been through all the papers dealing with the murders, and had decided to ask the magistrates for a week's remand when Bailey appeared before them.

To tell the truth, he had not the slightest hopes of getting any jury to convict on the little evidence before him, and he did not know exactly where to look for any more.

But, being a born optimist, he counted on Hunt being able to procure it for him. Consequently, he was considerably relieved when at last the very much overdue Inspector put in an appearance.

Hunt apologised for his lateness, and explained the reason for it.

Major Williams was very annoyed to think the escaped prisoner had been on his territory and had evaded arrest for so long. However, as the mischief was done, and Hunt had already acquainted Superintendent Walker with the facts, and Sergeant Kirk had the case in hand, he rapidly dismissed the matter from his mind as of no great importance, turning the conversation again to the murders of Constable James and Sir Charles.

He confessed to Hunt quite frankly that he was in a quandary, and explained to the Yard man that he looked to him to show him the way out.

"I'm sorry, sir," answered the Inspector, "but I myself am also in a hole. In fact, I was hoping that you would be able to help me, instead of me helping you."

He then explained his theory of how the murders were committed by Evans, who, he felt certain, induced Sir Charles to land in Angels, pointing out how, although his compass supported his ideas, the clue of the single track of prints was inexplicable.

The Chief Constable listened without comment until Hunt had finished. Then, after a few moments' consideration, he agreed that Hunt's theory seemed the only possible one that would allow both murders to be committed by the same person using the same weapon. How Evans got to the lane and back to his 'plane, leaving only a single track of footprints, was a puzzle too involved for him to solve.

"I think," began Hunt, as he selected a fresh cigarette from his case, "if we forget Bailey's account of the start of the flight, and try to reconstruct the case from the beginning, we might, between us, manage to discover where we are making our mistake."

"Quite," agreed the Chief Constable, "we might. Let's try again. I take it that we are going to accept the butler's statement that Mrs. Evans was in the 'plane when it left the hangar to be true? I forgot to tell you we took a statement from Mr. Day last evening, after you had left on your little joy-ride, and he corroborates the butler's story."

"Yes," replied Hunt, "I think we can accept that. Let's start from there. Now, first, we must discover what happened to Mrs. Evans. Is she lying dead in Christchurch Harbour—or has she joined her miss-

ing husband? Secondly, we must discover Mr. Evans' whereabouts—and the hiding-place of his 'plane. And, lastly, what part has Bailey played in these tragedies?"

The Chief Constable nodded in assent. "Yes—that puts the matter in a nutshell. When we know the answers to those questions our case will be complete—but, before we go any further, I can partly answer the last one already. At least, I can tell you one vitally important part that Bailey did *not* play—and when we find who did play it we shall be a long way on towards our solution."

"And what is that part, sir? I have certainly missed it," put in Hunt eagerly.

"Just that he could not have turned off the landing-light, and yet (according to Hucklesby) when he arrived back at the repair shop with the Bentley the light *was* out."

"That's an important point to be sure," said Hunt thoughtfully. "Fancy me overlooking such an obvious fact." Then—"Don't you think everything points to another person being in the plot—an accomplice whose job it was to turn off the light at the proper time?"

"I do," agreed the Chief Constable, "and to my mind, after taking every known fact of this amazing tangle into consideration, everything points to that accomplice being Evans' good lady. I'm inclined to believe the whole of Bailey's evidence was perjured evidence—and I doubt if Mrs. Evans travelled by air at all. But we'll have to thresh this matter out later. It's time we were in court."

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The proceedings that morning were very brief, only Hunt's evidence of arrest being given. The Chief Constable asked for a week's remand, which was immediately granted.

The prisoner was not represented. He caused some surprise by requesting that all editions of the local papers be supplied to him.

He went on to explain that they were very necessary to him to help him prepare his defence. He had a complete answer to the charge, but until a certain piece of news reached him his lips were sealed.

After a whispered conversation with the Chief Constable the magistrates granted this extraordinary request, and the mechanic was immediately taken back to the cells.

Neither Hunt nor Major Williams was very surprised to hear the accused's application for the papers; it certainly strengthened their theory that Bailey had an accomplice.

"No doubt he expects to get a message from someone—probably Evans," observed Hunt. "We must study all the advertisements carefully, no matter how innocent they may appear at first sight."

"Yes," agreed the Chief Constable. "I intend to give them my closest attention, but I don't think it will help us a lot, as Bailey's bound to speak the moment he receives his message."

They were back in the Chief Constable's little office by this time, and were preparing to settle for a lengthy conference. Hardly had they taken their places, when the telephone bell rang.

The Chief Constable leaned forward and picked up the receiver. The call was from Forest Court, it

transpired—Sir Charles' butler had news for them.

Sir Henry Sandleston, the new baronet, had arrived the previous evening, not long after the two police officials had departed.

Sturman had, he said, accepted him as the lawful occupier of the house, and had escorted him to Sir Charles' own room, where he had left him after receiving orders not to disturb him before 10 A.M.

To Sturman's surprise, however, Sir Henry was not in his room when he entered at 10.30 A.M. after repeatedly rapping on the door.

The bed did not appear to have been slept in, and no trace of the baronet was to be found. The front door, moreover, had been found unlocked.

This new development considerably upset the morning's plans, making an immediate journey to Lymington imperative. Hunt had to make a 'phone call to the Yard, so, whilst he was getting through, the Superintendent, who had just come into the office, and heard the news, sent for his car.

As soon as Hunt had finished his conversation they started their journey, and within a short while they were again travelling the now familiar road towards Lymington.

In spite of a thorough search of the house and grounds, Sturman and his helpers had been unable to find any trace of the missing Sir Henry Sandleston by the time the trio put in an appearance.

The butler stood waiting by the porch, his usually dignified face bearing a baffled, vacant expression. It was clear that the strain of the past few hours was beginning to tell on him.

He led the way through the spacious hall, down

the broad passage, and into Sir Charles' little study. After motioning them to seat themselves, he handed round a box of the dead airman's cigarettes, then prepared himself for the inevitable questioning.

As usual, Hunt took the inquiry in hand. It was about 2 A.M., he learned, when the new baronet rang the front door bell. He arrived on foot, but explained that he had paid off his taxi outside, preferring to walk up the short drive from the main road.

He had already dined and supped, he said, and, after a short chat during which he deplored the tragic event that had brought him there from his business in the North, he moved off to bed.

Of course, Sturman continued, he was not surprised to get orders not to call Sir Henry too early, as he had travelled far and certainly looked all in.

He was able to give a full description of the missing man. Hunt jotted down the particulars. Age about thirty-five; dark curly hair; swarthy complexion; well built, and about six feet in height. Wearing horn-rimmed spectacles and dressed in Harris tweeds. Carrying a light, fawn overcoat. "He bears a slight resemblance to my late master," the butler added, "but, if I may be permitted to say so, lacks his air of breeding."

This was all the information Sturman was able to give.

Hunt sat in silence for a moment, his hand clasped to his forehead, covering his eyes.

The Superintendent was framing his lips for a question when the Chief Constable forestalled him, taking the words from out of his mouth.

"Have you made certain," he asked, "that nothing is missing from the bedroom—or any other room, for that matter? No papers—or any articles of value?"

"Why, no!" exclaimed Sturman. "I haven't looked. But why should I?" he inquired. "A gentleman doesn't usually rob his own property."

"Oh, no," replied the Chief Constable, "of course not—I didn't mean that. I was wondering—are you positive—would you be prepared to swear—that the man you admitted *was* Sir Henry Sandleson?"

"Why, yes, sir. I would have no hesitation in swearing to it. I've met him, and spoken to him, before, and I never forget a face. There can be no doubt whatever about it. The gentleman I admitted was Sir Henry Sandleson."

"Well, in that case all we can do is to trace the taxi-driver who brought him here. He's probably either a Bournemouth or Southampton man," put in Walker.

"Yes," agreed the Chief Constable. "That's the next step, I think. What do you say, Inspector?"

Hunt drew his hand slowly down his face, raised his head and looked up. "Yes, that seems all we can do as regards tracing the movements of Sir Henry; but before we do anything else I should like to take a thorough look over this house. Would you care to conduct us?" he asked the butler.

"The servants' quarters included?" the latter asked.

"Yes," replied Hunt. "With your permission, I'd like to visit the whole house. We may just as well do the job properly whilst we are about it. And, Sturman," he added, "please keep your weather-eye

open—you'll probably find something *has* been disturbed."

The butler moved over to the wall and pressed a bell-button. "Lay lunch for three—in here," he ordered the neatly dressed maid who answered his summons.

"A fine idea," commented the Superintendent. "You're a marvel, Sturman," he added.

"Where do we begin, Inspector?" asked the Chief Constable.

Hunt considered for a moment. "Let's start from the top and work downwards," he replied at length.

"Well, then, if you are ready, gentlemen, follow me," invited Sturman. Suiting his actions to his words, he led the way back along the passage, through the hall, then up the massive main staircase.

Passing the first floor landing, they eventually reached the attics. These, Sturman explained, had been turned into workshops by Sir Charles, and up here the dead airman had spent a considerable amount of his time.

Opening the door at the top of the stairs (incidentally this was always kept locked), their guide led them along a broad, well-lit landing that appeared to run the whole length of the house.

"There are half a dozen rooms up here," explained the butler. "The two at the far end are used only for storing odds and ends, but the other four are all in daily use."

Proceeding down the passage, Sturman threw open the bottom door. The room contained a jumble of old trunks; old aeroplane fittings; and any amount

of old papers, the whole being covered with a thick layer of dust, while cobwebs hung from the ceiling, swaying gently in the draught.

Hunt and his colleagues took a quick look round. To go through the accumulated rubbish systematically would take them hours, perhaps even days. It seemed no useful purpose would be served by such a course, so Hunt presently motioned the others on.

The next room presented a more orderly appearance, being the storage-place of engine and other spare motor and aircraft fittings. A brief survey sufficed, and the three officials soon passed on from this to the next room, the first of those in daily use by Sir Charles up to the time of his demise.

This, Sturman explained, was the room in which Sir Charles had done most of his designing. It was fitted up with every convenience. A telephone stood by the rather disorderly mass of papers on the desk in the corner against the nearer wall, and an ash-tray by it showed its user to be a heavy smoker. An expensive electric fire was in position by the chimney, and in front of it, on the floor, there lay a splendid tiger-skin (bagged on the same expedition as the one in Evans' study at Moorlands, Hunt afterwards learned).

A smaller desk held a typewriter, a high-class dictaphone and several reference-books.

In the centre of the room was a large, strongly built, level oak bench, scrupulously clean. On this were several set-squares; rulers; callipers; drawing-boards and a varied collection of blue-prints. A glass-fronted cabinet containing the more delicate instruments lay face upwards near at hand.

Hunt cast a casual glance at the plans, wondering as he did so what would happen to the half-completed designs lying on the bench before his eyes.

Did they contain the germ of some new idea which would be snapped up eagerly by other designers when and if they came into the market, or were they too insufficiently advanced for any but the dead inventor to complete?

This room connected with the next by an inner door, as did the remaining three, so, after Sturman had assured them that, to the best of his knowledge, everything here was still in order, Hunt passed through the inner door into what appeared to be an extremely well-equipped workshop.

Everything the practical mechanic needed to help him ply his trade was here, and everything was left tidily in its appointed place.

There did not seem much chance of picking up a clue here, so, as Sturman was satisfied nothing had been taken, they continued on their tour of inspection.

The next room and its contents provided something in the nature of a surprise to the three police officials. It seemed as though they had passed into the natural history room of some private museum.

Confronting them, as they opened the door, was a stuffed panther, crouched as if to spring. Near by, more towards the centre of the room, two lion cubs gambolled, whilst their mother stood rigid, as if on guard over her offspring.

"Sir Charles bagged everything in this room himself, sir," remarked Sturman to the Chief Constable, his utterance given in the tone of one who has cause

to be proud of his handicraft—almost as though he himself had done the bagging. As a matter of fact, he had not been in Sir Charles' service when the majority of the exhibits were taken, but he had heard so often the well-deserved admiration of visitors that he had come to accept their praise as a matter of course.

Even Hunt, a worker at all times, but now the hard-pressed investigator of two callous murders, was unable to tear himself away from the room for some minutes. After inspecting a few smaller fauna in the vicinity of the lioness, he turned his attention to the walls, around which ran tier upon tier of glass-fronted cases, all numbered and labelled.

Those down the two longer walls contained birds, brightly plumaged representatives of every continent, ranging from the diminutive humming-bird of South America to the more common bullfinch of the British Isles. Each exhibit was set as nearly as possible in its natural surroundings, in many cases the nest and eggs being shown also.

The two shorter sides of the museum contained: on the north side, fish, and on the south side, reptiles. Reptiles of all sizes and nations—from the little adder, so plentiful on the headland where Sir Charles had crashed, to the black mamba of Darkest Africa.

Many of the birds, particularly the English ones, had been stuffed by Sir Charles himself, explained Sturman. His dead master was, he said, a man who could turn his hand to anything, as they would see by the examination of the next room, where every exhibit was of his own fashioning.

And, indeed, before many minutes had elapsed,

they all confirmed the butler's statement. For this room was a veritable abode of art—art in all its forms.

On the walls hung drawings and paintings of every conceivable kind: black and white prints; landscapes and portraits in oil and water-colour; a few hand-coloured photographs; all exquisite examples, seemingly flawless.

Little tables and niches in various parts of the room contained statues, wrought in metal in some instances, carved in marble in others, while yet more were of the purest alabaster.

Hunt recognised an effigy of Sir Charles himself among the latter examples, an excellent life-size replica of the head and shoulders. Truly the dead baronet had been a great craftsman.

A few minutes sufficed for Sturman to ascertain that the contents of the room were as they should be, then the party went out on to the landing again. After the butler had relocked the doors, they all descended to the bedrooms.

Sir Charles' room was the first to be visited. A spacious room, giving a grand view of the park and lake, it contained very little furniture, though what there was was good, and well chosen.

Among the pictures on the walls was a photograph of the Evanses standing by their little white monoplane, taken but a fortnight since.

There was little to detain them here, for the room bore no trace of the brief tenancy of Sir Henry. Sturman paid particular attention to the room, even rapidly going through the dressing-table drawers,

but once again, he assured them, everything was intact.

The examination of the other bedrooms was brief yet thorough, but it yielded no clue to the lynx-eyed Inspector from the Yard. Neither, for that matter, did it enlighten the Chief Constable or Superintendent Walker. The downstairs rooms were next gone over just as efficiently, but with still the same result—nothing disturbed and no clue. The mystery surrounding Sir Henry's disappearance seemed inexplicable!

XI

THE DEAD MAN'S BOOTS

THE officials having invited Sturman to join them at their meal, an extra place was laid, and the four sat down to table.

For some time everyone tried to keep the conversation off the crimes and to talk of less sordid things. But, no matter what subject cropped up, it sooner or later led directly back to one or other of the chief characters in this tragic drama.

For instance, an intended attack by an American on the water speed record as a topic brought Sir Charles' name to the fore. He was, Sturman declared, an extremely capable, though daring, driver, and his little outboard motor-boat, which he kept in the boathouse on the lakeside, was one of the fastest of its class in the country.

Similarly, a discussion on the danger of the motor-cycle as a means of transport turned the conversation on to Jim Hucklesby and his hopes and chances in the race for the Tourist Trophy. The next stage was for Hunt to recall his exciting pillion ride, which led directly to the subject of Bailey.

As the officials naturally were loath to expatiate their theories before an outsider, especially one who must himself be regarded (like all the others at Forest Court) with a certain amount of suspicion, the conversation was inclined to lapse for a time.

Then, after one of the latest "talkies" had been the subject of a spirited argument for some minutes, and the talk tended to drift towards the film which Sir Charles and the Evanses were engaged in producing, the telephone bell began to ring.

Sturman answered the call, then immediately handed the instrument to the Superintendent.

The disturber of their talk was Sergeant Kirk, who had startling news. He had, he said, had the body of the convict Newton removed to a room at the Crown Inn at Redstock. The Coroner had decided to open the inquest at 5 P.M. Dr. Grier, the police surgeon, had decided that death was in all probability due to natural causes, but he would, of course, hold a post-mortem examination.

The matter that Kirk wanted to draw the Superintendent's attention to, was, he thought, peculiar, to say the least of it.

He had been examining the dead man's boots with a view to connecting him with the maker of the single set of tracks in the adjoining meadow. He had discovered, however (from notes in his pocket-book and a photograph of the prints), that the boots were much too small to fit the tracks, and was replacing them by the body when something drew his eyes to the dead man's feet.

It struck him at once as curious that the wearer of such weather-beaten footgear as the old boots were should have feet so well formed and free from corns and blisters.

Bending lower, he had suddenly noticed that the feet appeared to be too large for the boots by the body to fit them.

Losing no time, he had proceeded to put his theory to the test. Unlacing one of the boots, he had attempted to fit it to the foot.

As he expected, he was unable to do so. It was obvious that the dead man never had, and never would have, been able to wear so small a size as a six.

His next step had been to call the doctor's attention to the matter. Dr. Grier had not only been able to confirm his opinion regarding the impossibility of Newton wearing the boots, but had also been able to assure him that the dead man's correct size was an eight, and, judging by the well-preserved state of the feet, he was confident the convict *had* been wearing his normal size up to the time of death.

This new development was likely to put an entirely different complexion on the case, and as Sturman had, on hearing the message was for the police, excused himself and left the room, the three were free to decide in privacy the next step to be taken.

Major Williams possessed a quick brain, and volunteered his opinion immediately. "I think," he began in a strong manner, "it is obvious that we must now regard Newton with the gravest suspicion.

"Here we have an escaped convict, a desperate man, as his record shows, hiding from justice, and considering the police as his most dangerous enemies. Now the murdered man, James, was a police officer. That fact alone gives us a motive.

"The very fact of the convict's body being discovered not more than ten minutes' walk from the place where Ball found the body of the constable shows us that in all probability Newton had the opportunity. Indeed, the news that he was up in Red-

stock begging writing materials from Mrs. Abbot strengthens and confirms my view that he had the opportunity.

"Now as regards the means. We don't know yet that he had the means, but *I* think it is highly probable that he had. You will remember the ending of the description broadcast concerning him when he made his escape from Parkhurst last March? 'He is a dangerous man, and may be carrying firearms.'"

Here the Chief Constable paused for a few moments, pondering how best to continue. The others watched him intently. It had been clear to them all along that he had taken the murder of one of his most promising men very much to heart.

Presently he continued, "Of course, the murder was not premeditated. Picture yourself in Newton's place. He had walked across the meadow, through the marshy patch, where he must have realised he was leaving footprints, and across to the hedge where James stood in Redstock Lane.

"Here he was challenged by the constable. Unless he could silence him quickly—and silence him for good—he must be prepared to go back to prison, to be shut away inside those grey, unrelenting walls, to lose touch with his fellow creatures, and to say good-bye to freedom for the next five years. And this time there would be no chance of escape—a prison-breaker does not get a second chance.

"Then, of course, he used his gun. Once the constable fell dead he must have realised that he had burned his boats. The thought of the footprints must have crossed his mind. How was he to make good his escape? A difficult enough proposition for

any man; what must it have been like for Newton, a man already being hounded from pillar to post? The matter called for the greatest caution—one false step and then the gallows.

"Well, gentlemen—we know he had been in the neighbourhood at least a couple of days. He must have seen the cows come up from the Valley Meadow, cross the road into Angels, and then go up by the spot where he must have been standing, to the gate at the farther end of the pasture.

"Here, perhaps, was a chance of escape. If he picked his way carefully to the road, avoiding the softer patches *en route*, he could hope for the passing cattle to remove all traces in the morning.

"Then, as an extra precaution, he may have removed his boots before going out on to the highway. No, on second thoughts I'll wash that idea out. A man parading the highway carrying his boots would be an object of suspicion—and that was what he had to avoid being now at all costs.

"At any rate, I'm pretty certain that before carrying out the next part of his scheme he walked backwards and forwards across that portion of the roadway that lay between the gates, over which the cows would pass, until all traces of the wet mud had been removed from his boots.

"Then, when he was satisfied that all was gone, I feel sure that he carried on down the main road towards Highcliffe. Now, about three hundred yards down the road from Totland Corner there's a little coppice, or, rather, a little dell, the banks of which are covered with bushes. The place is a favourite camping-ground for gipsies. In this hollow lies an

amazing collection of kettles, pots and pans, old hats and other articles of apparel, and the usual quota of old boots, the cast-away junk of the campers.

"At the meadow end of the gully is a deep pond, through which a stream is always running—you know the place, Walker, I'm sure."

"Yes," replied the Superintendent. "I know it well; we're always being called there to move the campers on. It's private property, but the gipsies seem to regard it as theirs by hereditary right."

Hunt did not know the actual spot to which the local men were referring, but was able to visualise it quite easily. There were many such dumps in country districts, he knew from experience.

The Chief Constable started on the final lap of his theory.

"Here I consider Newton to have made his great mistake. Probably, due to his nervousness, he wanted to get rid of his betraying boots at the earliest possible moment. Seeing all the old boots around, or knowing from what he had seen during a previous foraging expedition that the dump contained boots, he immediately threw his own boots and the revolver into the pond, weighting the former more likely than not.

"Then, to his horror and disappointment, he discovered that all the boots in the dell were too small. His plan for escape frustrated, what was he to do? Far better to lie low than to run the risk of being seen walking bootless on the night of the murder. From where he was he had no trouble to get back to his shelter—it was just across the meadow—and the damp grass would not have marked his feet," the

Chief Constable concluded, a look of justifiable pride growing on his face.

"A wonderful theory, sir," said the Superintendent approvingly. "And right, too, I should say. Every fact in its place—and not a flaw that I can see. I suppose you expect to recover the boots and gun by dragging?"

"Yes. I'd better get some men on the job right away. What do you say, Inspector?"

"Yes," replied Hunt. "Dragging seems the best way of testing the soundness of your theory. I suppose you assume that Newton carried the small pair of boots for appearance' sake—just in case anyone looked in the hut?"

"Exactly," assented the Chief Constable. "That would be the only reason." He looked at Hunt keenly. "I fancy that you don't altogether find my theory to your liking, Inspector?" he queried.

Hunt's thoughtful expression gave way to a smile. "I find your theory extremely interesting, and it's possibly correct," he replied evasively, "but, if you'll pardon my differing, sir, I think you've left out one important point, which has, I feel certain, a direct bearing on the case."

"And that?"

"The car that stopped in Redstock Lane."

The Chief Constable was silent for a moment. Truth to tell, the presence of the car had been in the back of his mind throughout. "Of course, the car may have had nothing to do with the crime, after all," he suggested. "All we know is that it passed up Redstock Lane after the constable had begun to

retrace his steps from the junction of the lane and main road.

"Possibly the constable already lay dead, and the driver stopped the car to render assistance. Then, seeing the policeman was beyond human aid, may he not have driven off again?"

"He may," agreed Hunt. "Quite possibly.—But don't you think as he did not report the tragedy that he must have had guilty knowledge?"

This question was something in the nature of a stumbling-block to the Chief Constable, who mumbled something about "being in a panic," but his tone no longer carried conviction.

"And again," continued Hunt. "It's my theory that both this murder and that of Sir Charles Stafford were carried out by the same person using the same weapon. I can't see how we can fit Newton in as the murderer of Sir Charles."

"No. I agree with you there. Newton could hardly have done both murders—unless there's a lot more in this case that has still to come out. But you'll agree with me when I say that the same weapon was not *necessarily* used?"

"Oh, quite, sir. I grant you I may be wrong. Anyhow, we shall soon know; I'm expecting a report from Inspector Carliss of the Armoury Department at the Yard. It should be down any time now, and I have the strongest premonition still that my opinion will be proved to be correct."

"Perhaps so," granted the Chief Constable. "Perhaps so." Then—"Have you formed any theory yourself, Inspector?"

"Hardly a theory, sir. Just an idea. . . . When

you 'phone up the station to get your men on the job of dragging the pond, perhaps you will be good enough to get this message circulated," replied Hunt, producing a pencil and paper.

He wrote for a couple of minutes, his pencil gliding easily over the sheet. "Perhaps it would pay to get some bills printed too. Could that be arranged, Superintendent?"

"Yes," replied Walker. "No trouble at all. What do you want done?"

"Just this. I'll read it through. This for the police:

"**WANTED.** Information as to the whereabouts of a man of the tramp class, probably of small physique. Wearing boots size eight, two sizes too large for him. Was in the vicinity of Redstock between dates May 20th and 24th last.'

"And for the bills:

"**'Will the man who changed boots with a dead man in a hut near village of Redstock between May 20th and May 24th please communicate at once with the nearest police station. No action will be taken against him, and reward will be given him for information he possesses.'**"

XII

A LOOK ROUND THE GROUNDS

THE others saw at once the trend of Hunt's idea. "A good alternative theory," commented the Superintendent. "It's just as well to have two strings to our bow." Then—"I'll get on the 'phone at once," he continued, reaching for the instrument, "and get your messages out."

The Chief Constable had risen to his feet and stood gazing thoughtfully out of the window. "Shall we take a look round the outbuildings," he asked, "whilst Walker is 'phoning our instructions through? There's no especial hurry for us to get out to the pond; it'll take the men an hour or so to get on the job."

"Yes," replied Hunt. "I was going to suggest the same thing myself."

The hangars and the garage being nearest to the house, joined by a passage, it will be remembered, it was to them that Hunt led the way.

Nothing had been disturbed here. The little single-seater 'plane alone occupied the hangar, and the Rover and Bugatti were still in their places in the garage.

The search of the few odd outbuildings revealed nothing of interest, and they were just about to return to Walker in the study when Hunt remembered that Bailey's cottage and the outbuildings near by had only had the most casual inspection.

At that moment a gardener came in sight. Hunt called him over to ascertain if the buildings by the lakeside were kept locked up during the daytime.

He thought not, he said, but would slip indoors and fetch the keys in case they were, and accompany them if they wished. Hunt intimated his acceptance of this offer, and, after a couple of minutes' absence, the man rejoined them with the necessary keys.

They were comparatively silent during the journey across the park, the gardener especially so, being awed, no doubt, at the thought of the company he was in.

Arrived at this part of the estate, Bailey's cottage was the first place to receive attention. The search here, though brief, was thorough, but no clues were discovered hidden away amongst the arrested mechanic's belongings.

The electric power station was next visited. Quite a small building, its space was almost entirely utilised by the necessary machinery. A small petrol engine was fixed to the floor, just inside the door; a few feet farther on stood the belt-driven dynamo; while the far end of the shed held the bubbling cells. A small switch-board connected to the batteries completed the equipment.

From here a brief visit to the repair shop revealed the fact that Jim had fetched his motor-cycle from the constable's house at Houghton, and had, presumably, returned the trusty Morris.

Hucklesby nodded pleasantly to the two officials, blushing like a schoolgirl when the Chief Constable complimented him again on his daring driving of the night before.

This concluded the search, with the exception of the boathouse on the lakeside, which Hunt wanted to see, more out of curiosity than with hopes of picking up a clue.

The wooden structure was some twenty feet long by fifteen wide. It contained a couple of outboard motor-boats and a flat-bottomed punt. The shed had been built over a little natural harbour, which allowed the boats to float in a good six feet of water.

Noticing a sodden handkerchief lying in the bottom of the punt, Hunt stepped into the craft and picked it up. Inspecting it, he found that it bore the initials D. E.

"One of young Evans', by the look of things," he said to the Chief Constable.

The remark seemed to awaken memories in the gardener's brain. "Oh, yes," he started. Luckily he spoke slowly, for the officials were hard put to follow his atrocious English. "I can tell yer 'ow that comes ter be there. . . . The late marster, tho' I sez it mesself what 'as no right ter, used ter drive these 'ere boats abaht like 'ell. Didn't use ter use no gumptun at all—'e 'ad ter swim forrit on two occasions that I knowed of larst week.

"Yer see that little buoy out yonder?" he queried, pointing a gnarled forefinger out beyond the open end of the boathouse to where a small black object could be seen floating in the centre of the lake.

The two police officers replied in the affirmative.

"Well," he continued, "Sir Charles 'ad a 'abit uf drivin' rounne there as close in h'as 'e cud git. Sometimes 'e got rounne—sometimes 'e didn't. . . . When 'e was a practisin' like this 'ere 'e kept the punt

moored close by so as 'e 'adn't fur ter swim—an' then when 'e got ter it 'e got in an' pushed over ter 'is motor-boat, what didn't use ter sink but floated upside downe. . . . Then 'e'd fix a towrope an' 'aul it back ashore.

"That's what I alwus sed 'ud be the endin' of 'im—drownin', not flyin'—'e were safe enuf up there. . . . H'as I told my missis larst Wensdy, or let me see, were it Tewsdy—I carn't call it ter mind exactly, but I know she 'ad just got back from ole Widder Corrigan's an—"

Hunt cut his reminiscences short. "Yes," he said, "but you haven't told us yet how the handkerchief came to be left in the punt."

"Lor' bless yer, no! I was furgettin' abaht that thro' thinkin' uf ole Widder Corrigan, as naggin' an' gossipin' ole 'ag as ever walked on two feet," he replied, his dislike of the Widow Corrigan showing plainly on his weather-beaten face.

"'Twus like this 'ere," he went on. "Abaht 'arf arter ten t'other night, the night they 'ad a bit uf a do up at the 'ouse, I wus out—"

The Chief Constable pulled him up. "You mean the night before last?" he inquired.

"Yes, that's right, the night afore larst. As I wus sayin' I went out abaht 'arf arter ten to 'ave a larst look rounne at my snares—"

Here he stopped short and looked at the Chief Constable.

"Sir Charles used ter let me do a bit of rabbitin'," he ventured to explain.

"Of course. Why not?" said the Chief Constable

soothingly. "I believe Sir Charles mentioned the fact to me," he added untruthfully.

Reassured, the gardener resumed his narrative.

"Well, when I got downe ter a spot oppisit the boat'ouse on t'other side uf the lake I 'eard wun uf the moter-boats startin' up. Uf course it was a luvly moonlight night, as bright as day at the time, tho' it come on ter rain 'ard later. Well—arter a moment out come the boat at a 'ell of a lick, an' it went racin' roun the lake a time or two.

"There wus two people in it; wun wus Sir Charles 'isself—an' t'other yung Mr. Evans, whose 'anker-chief you're 'oldin' in your 'and.

"Then I set eyes on the punt comin' across the water. When it got ter jus' by the buoy it stopped—an' I cud see who wus in it.

"It were yung Mr. Evans, a lookin' as graceful as a—"

He scratched his head thoughtfully, as if hoping to produce a suitable word, but, receiving no inspiration, left the sentence unfinished.

"Then Sir Charles," he went on, "started ter open 'er out. Lor', didn't 'e muve. Seemed so much farster in the moonlight some'ow. Roun an' roun 'e shot, gittin' closer an' closer to the buoy each time 'e tried. Then 'e did it once tew often, an' over went the 'ole bag uf tricks an' shot 'em in the water. Of course they swum ter the punt an' as soon as I see'd they wus all right I pusht on ter 'ave a dec' at the rest uf me wires."

"I see," said Hunt. "You think Mr. Evans must have used the handkerchief to help dry himself, and then left it in the punt?"

"Yessir," agreed the gardener. "That's 'ow I figur's it out."

"Well, there's not much to interest us here, Inspector, is there?" asked the Chief Constable. "Are you ready to go back to the house?"

"Yes," replied Hunt, "we've seen all there is to see on this part of the estate. Let's go and drag your pond."

They were soon back at the house, and as they left the gardener Hunt tipped him the price of a drink. True, he had not been of much assistance to them, but he might still prove of value if looked after.

Walker was trying one of Sir Charles' cigars, sitting well back in an easy chair, a pencil in his hand and his notebook on his knee, when they re-entered the study.

He closed the book when he saw them enter, rising to join them. "Best cigar I've had for a twelve-month," he declared. "Try one, gentlemen?" he invited, generously pushing the box across.

"No, not for me," said Hunt. "I'll have a cigarette."

"Try one of these," said the Chief Constable, opening his case and passing it over—at the same time helping himself to a Corona with his other hand.

But, before either of them could light up, the telephone bell rang. Hunt, being nearest, took off the receiver.

"From the station," he announced, after a moment or so, then, putting his hand over the mouth-piece, added: "It's about Bailey. He says he wants to make a statement!"

XIII

AT THE POND

THE effect of Hunt's statement on the other two was almost magical. The look of intense seriousness on Major Williams' face gave way to an expression of eager hopefulness, whilst the Superintendent grinned expansively.

"Coming to his senses, is he?" remarked Walker. "Now perhaps we shall be able to see a glimmer of daylight."

"Yes," said Hunt thoughtfully, "now we shall know exactly what part the Bentley played in the crime."

"You think he will tell the truth?" queried the Chief Constable.

"I do," answered Hunt. "He's too scared now to attempt any bluff. It'll be the truth, and, I think, the whole truth.—Don't forget the time is getting on, and he has had the first edition of the paper."

"You think Evans has communicated with him, then?" asked the Superintendent. Then—"If he has," he added, thinking deeply, and not waiting for a reply, "it means, of course, that he has got well away—but still, he cannot have left the country, or he could not have inserted the advertisement."

"And in that case his handicap should soon play him into our hands," commented Hunt.

"Handicap—what handicap?"

"The handicap of losing all his money. We can assume from what we've already gathered that the whole of his worldly goods were in that bag of Evans'. And, as we have the bag, it follows that his movements are limited. Sooner or later he'll have to show himself, and then—"

"Yes," agreed Walker, "I had certainly overlooked the money question. Perhaps our case is not going to be so very difficult after all. Well, as we're ready, gentlemen, let's get to the car. . . ."

Soon after passing through Highcliffe, they stopped at the little wooded dell where the dragging operations were about to take place.

A couple of motor-cycles were already drawn up by the roadside, and as the trio descended from their car a police tender drew in sight.

The sergeant in charge, stepping out, saluted the Chief Constable, who explained to him the reason for the dragging order being given.

Then, seeing the men were ready, he led the way, over some low iron railings, through the thick bushes behind them, into the meadow, and so round to the pond.

The Chief Constable and Superintendent brought up the rear of the procession with Hunt, but the Inspector, after climbing the rails, chose the lower route through the dell, past the pots and pans and old clothes that were a conspicuous feature of the dump. He halted here a few minutes before rejoining the others, giving his whole attention to the cast-away articles of apparel. Then, satisfied, he proceeded through to the little party, feeling that his

foresight promised to save them some considerable time.

The Chief Constable stood apart from the others, waiting for the men to begin. He could guess from Hunt's face as the Inspector approached him that the Yard man had discovered something. He began to feel too that the "something" was a snag in his theory.

He was not far wrong, as the Inspector's first words showed him.

"I'm sorry, sir," Hunt began as he came up to him, "but I'm afraid our dragging's not going to be the success we had hoped."

"Oh! Why not? Out with it, Inspector.—You've already had a find, I know."

"Yes," replied Hunt. "I believe I have. If you can spare a minute, just come with me and see for yourself. It'll be a bit of a disappointment, though, I'm afraid."

The Chief Constable followed without a word. What clue had he missed this time, he wondered.

Walker, perceiving the other two move off, followed in their wake. Opposite to the heap of rubbish, Hunt pulled up. "You'll see there's over a dozen old boots in this little pile," he said. "I picked them all up in less than a couple of minutes. . . . You'll find every one is an eight—or even larger.—There's not a six among them!"

The Chief Constable realised immediately that the Inspector's find exploded his theory of Newton being the murderer most effectively. It was hardly feasible that the convict snatched up the first two boots he came across and bolted barefoot, without even

trying them on. No, his case against the dead man seemed damaged irretrievably.

But he bore no malice against the Yard man. A man with the Inspector's varied experience and brilliant deductive powers was, he realised, too valuable a helpmate to upset by showing signs of jealousy. Indeed, he openly considered himself extremely lucky to be able to enjoy the younger man's friendship, and wondered whether, if he had been without the Inspector's valuable assistance, Bailey would have been safe under lock and key.

Although he had almost lost faith in his theory, on Hunt's advice he gave the men instructions to carry on with the dragging, on the off-chance of something coming to light, before rejoining the Inspector and Walker, who were walking to the car.

A few minutes later they were again on the road. Apart from their breaking their journey at Christchurch where they partook of a hurried cup of tea, and a chance meeting with old Pope, the coastguard, as they left the café, the trip was quite uneventful.

Within a few minutes of their arrival the mechanic was shown into the little room where the three officials sat. At a nod from the Superintendent, the two constables who had escorted the prisoner withdrew.

Hunt proceeded to take charge of the situation. He began in a kindly manner, asking Bailey to take a chair, and offering him a cigarette. This the unhappy man accepted, lighting it with visibly trembling hands.

"So you're going to help us clear this mystery up?" he asked pleasantly, studying his man intently the while.

"I'm going to tell you what I was doing at Totland Corner with the Bentley," replied the little man. "You may not believe it, but all you are going to hear is the truth, the absolute truth. I can do no harm to anyone by speaking now.

"If you had not agreed to let me see this paper"—he touched his coat pocket, in which Hunt could see something bulging—"I should not have sent for you. I should probably never have spoken—and I know you'll never be able to hang me on the little evidence you've got."

He spoke the truth, and the others knew it. The evidence was purely circumstantial, and no jury would be likely to convict.

"It's going to be a fairly long story, I'm afraid, but I'd better start at the very beginning. I've learnt from this paper that you have found the dead body of an escaped convict, Alfred Newton. I suppose this report is quite correct?"

Hunt nodded, puzzled. "Quite correct."

"Well, then, before I go any further I might as well tell you that Alfred Newton was my brother . . . his real name, of course, was Alfred Bailey!"

This announcement came as something of a shock to the Inspector. A totally unexpected development. He made no comment, however, but produced a notebook and pencil, intending to take the statement down in shorthand.

Bailey had paused for a moment, but, seeing the Yard man was waiting for him, he continued: "I was born in a little country town near Oxford. My father was a labourer and, I'm afraid, he liked his drop of booze. My brother Alfred was three years

older than me—we had a sister between us, but she died quite young. We were always about together, my brother and I, and always up to pranks. Very often we used to get into quite serious trouble, my brother especially so.

“One day I went with another boy named Dick Brown to raid an orchard not far from the town. We’d been in trouble there before—that only added to the fun. The farmer had carried on like a madman the last time he caught us there. He said that the next time he caught us he would hand us straight over to the police.

“Well, as luck would have it, we got caught again. My brother had apparently watched us creep into the orchard and had seen us captured by the farmer, who took us to an outhouse and locked us in before going off to find a policeman.

“Alfred waited his chance and tried to help us. The farmer had taken the key away with him, so he couldn’t open the door. The only other way of getting out was by the window, but this was set up some ten feet from the ground and we had no way of reaching it. We were only little fellows, mind you. I’m not very big now, and I was only eleven then. The window business seemed too hard a nut to crack, so all we could do was to sit down and wait for the policeman.

“Then Alfred had a brain-wave. He hunted in the other buildings until he found a rope. Looking round further, he found a long rake. Coming back to the shed we were locked up in, he called out that he had a plan. We were to get as far away from the window as we could, bend down, and cover our

faces. He was going to smash the window and throw the rope in to us. We did as he told us, and the glass fell in with a crash. . . . But the rope never came. Just as Alf was a gettin' ready to chuck it up he was collared by the blinkin' farmer, who had got back quicker than we expected he would with the copper. This smashing of the window just about put the tin lid on things. We were all three given in charge.

"Of course, in those days the magistrates were often too severe. We came up before a fairly lenient one. He took the ages of Dick and me into consideration and let us off with a good dressing down. But he regarded Alfred, who was quite innocent really, as the ringleader. In spite of our pleadings, he sent him to Borstal. . . .

"Borstal wasn't the place then it is in these days. When he came back to us three years later he was completely ruined. He had 'got in' with the *worst* of the inmates, and soon left us again to join his new-found companions in Town. In a very short time he had become a hardened little criminal. Time after time he went to prison, and every time I tried to get him to mend his ways. I felt, you'll understand, that I was responsible for this terrible state of affairs. I was, you'll agree, at the bottom of all his troubles. . . . And it was up to me to help him all I could.

"Now, long years in prison had ruined his constitution, and when he was sentenced last time, and sent down for seven years, I guessed he would never live to serve his time. His heart, especially, was always giving him trouble.

"And then—to get to recent events—after his escape he found his way to me at Forest Court. I hid him in my cottage for weeks, waiting a chance to get him abroad. Wouldn't you have done the same? I had only a little money saved up, and that of course was his for the asking—or, without it, for that matter.

"All was going well until one night he met a policeman when he was walking alone in the park. He did a bolt, and the constable, thinking he was a poacher, told Sir Charles, who asked him to keep an eye on the place. For nights on end this cop kept watch in the park, coming across to my cottage for a chat more often than not. I believe, myself, that he had an idea something funny was going on. . . .

"Then one night, thinking the game was pretty nearly up, and that I should get into serious trouble over the part I was playing in it, he took his hook.

"I had no idea where he had gone, until, a week later, I had a letter from him. I've torn it up I'm afraid—you'll have to take my word for it. In this letter he asked if all was clear at Forest Court. If so, he wrote, could I pick him up at 3.30 A.M. on Tuesday, the 23rd of May, at Totland Corner. He was in difficulties, he said; practically starving; and he couldn't hope to hang out much longer. . . .

"As I told you at the inquest, Sir Charles took off at 3 A.M. exactly. I waited a minute or so, in case he wanted to land again, before switching off the light. Then, running to the repair shop, I got out the Bentley.

"I ran it down the Green Lane and out on to the

main Lymington road. I drove fairly fast, and I got to Totland Corner at 3.25 A.M. I'm sure of that time—3.25 to the minute.

"My brother was not on the Corner, so, after waiting three or four minutes, I drove up Redstock Lane a little way so as to be able to put the lights out for a few minutes, as the last thing I wanted to do was attract attention. I went up about fifty yards or so before stopping and switching off the lights.

"As my eyes got used to the semi-darkness I noticed something lying by the roadside.

"Thinking perhaps my brother had hurt himself whilst climbing over the hedge, or, more probably, had had another heart-attack, I jumped out of the car and stepped across the lane.

"I had a flashlight in my pocket.—Finding it, I turned it on. . . .

"Imagine my horror and surprise when I found myself gazing into the face of a dead policeman.

"And what a face!" He shuddered at the memory. "All screwed up with pain—and the hot, red blood still gushing out of a gaping wound in the forehead."

He stopped for a moment to wipe off the beads of perspiration that had gathered on his face. He was living again the dreadful minutes of his discovery.

His very earnest manner convinced his listeners that they had so far heard the truth. And his evidence was of vital importance to the police.

"Of course," he continued shortly, "I jumped back into the car, and started up. This was a nice mess to be in. What was I to do?

"I guessed at once that my brother had somehow got hold of a revolver, and had been stopped by the policeman as he was on his way to meet me on the Corner. I knew that he was desperate; that if he thought he could get away with it he would have no hesitation in shooting an enemy down in cold blood.

"It stood to reason that I couldn't take him to the cottage after this. I had no wish to become an accessory after the fact by hiding a murderer from justice, though, of course, I was still prepared to help him in any other way I could.

"To avoid turning the car by the body, I carried on up the lane through Redstock, returning that way home.

"Of course, you know the rest, Inspector."

XIV

THE CHIEF CONSTABLE SOLVES A MYSTERY

So this cleared up the mystery of the car-tracks. But, instead of throwing light on the whereabouts of the murderer, it left the police more in the dark than ever.

Reaching over, Hunt pressed a bell-button in the wall. A constable answered the summons.

"Take the prisoner out," the Inspector ordered, "but keep him near at hand. We may want him again in a few minutes."

Left to themselves, none of the three spoke for some considerable time. Each was deep in thought—attempting to reconstruct the case now so much of it had seemingly collapsed.

It was Major Williams who first broke the silence. "Everything points to the man Newton being the murderer of my constable after all," he said. "Even his brother admits that he was due at Totland Corner at 3.30 A.M., the scene and approximate time of the crime."

He paused, then, more slowly and thoughtfully, selecting a cigarette from his case the while:

"I'm now rather inclined to think that he didn't throw his boots away, but I feel certain that we shall find the weapon sooner or later. I'm glad I left the men to drag the pond, in spite of the upsetting of

my theory by the finding of all those boots in the dell."

"Yes," agreed Hunt, "Newton appears the obvious suspect at a first glance. But is he?—Let's think it out. . . .

"The fact that he has been hiding on Sir Charles' estate in some ways helps, and in other ways complicates, matters. Even if we *can* prove that Sir Charles *did* land in Angels Meadow, and so give Newton the opportunity to commit the double murder, it doesn't explain how Sir Charles' 'plane came to crash on the Head.

"Now, with Evans doing both the murders, and both at Totland Corner," he ruminated, "this last difficulty disappears—for Evans, with his knowledge of flying, would be able to start off Sir Charles' 'plane with the dead body in the cockpit.

"I doubt if Newton had this knowledge—I'll inquire presently—but even if he had, we have the presence of Mrs. Evans to account for. . . . It's hardly likely that she would stand by and see her best friend shot.

"No!—Bringing Newton into it involves, I think, a triple murder. To make any sense at all he would have had to shoot Mrs. Evans also. What the motive for this supposed wholesale slaying could have been, I can't for the life of me imagine.

"Of course, if he did kill all three, I grant you Mrs. Evans' body might quite conceivably have fallen from the 'plane, as has been suggested, into Christchurch Harbour. . . . But to add to these rather far-fetched suggestions, to make our case against Newton complete, we must believe Dennis

Evans *also* has met with disaster in some way or other. He has not been heard of for over thirty-six hours, and, if he is still alive and innocent of conspiracy, why is he in hiding?"

"This certainly is a staggering case, an amazing tangle of probable and improbable theories," remarked the Superintendent. "We build up theory after theory and the Inspector picks holes in them all—almost before the words have had time to cool out of our mouths." Then, seeing the others were deep in thought, he lapsed into silence.

But the Chief Constable still stuck to his guns.

"All right," he said. "I'll grant you the case against Newton—*alone*—has broken down—but for *one thing*. I still do not agree that both murders were committed with the same weapon. So in one theory I still say Newton *alone*."

"Now, in my *other*, I'll fall in with *your* theory that both crimes were committed with the one weapon. What's wrong with this for a working hypothesis? . . .

"For some reason at present unknown to us, the Evanses plotted to murder Sir Charles, but decided to call in outside help—as it happens, the choice fell on Newton. *Why* it fell on Newton, we may find out later, but it's not impossible to imagine that they had good reasons for their choice—or even that they had Newton in their power."

"No," replied Hunt, "we'll agree that's not unreasonable. Carry on."

"Good. Now to continue. Young Evans has made arrangements to retire to some predetermined place, where Mrs. Evans will join him after the crime

has been committed. As his 'plane has disappeared, it's probable that it's a yacht at sea. . . . He could alight on the water by it and his 'plane would soon be lost beneath the waves. Mrs. Evans, by some pretext, persuades Sir Charles to make a landing in Angels.

"As soon as they are down, or perhaps after they have turned the 'plane round ready to take off again, the convict Newton appears, and shoots Sir Charles through the back of the head. . . .

"Now we can get over the difficulty of Newton restarting the 'plane. He doesn't!—Mrs. Evans does it herself. You'll agree now, Inspector, that this shows a way of getting over the mystery of the disappearance of Mrs. Evans' body?"

"Yes, most effectively, sir. And then what?" queried the really interested Hunt.

The Chief Constable resumed. "Waiting on the main road at Totland Corner is a car. . . . After seeing the 'Moth' off on its strange journey, they cross the meadow to it. Just by the hedge the two are challenged by Constable James.—You know the rest. Newton draws his gun, and a second cruel murder is committed in that peaceful country lane.

"And then, down to the road. The accomplice drives off with Mrs. Evans. The murderer, for some reason, is prepared to remain behind—and, I think, the mystery is complete."

Walker, who had for the moment forgotten a vital piece of evidence that was contradictory to the theory, was inclined to be impressed.

"And this other accomplice—have you formed any opinion as to who he might be?" he asked eagerly,

a suspicion beginning to take form in his mind.

And the Chief Constable's reply, "I have a shrewd idea it was our intoxicated Mr. Day—but not so incapable as the others imagined," was what he had half expected to hear.

The Superintendent sat deep in thought for fully a minute. Then he put his second question. "But, according to Sturman's evidence, Day did not leave the house until after the 'planes had taken off. If you are relying on the lights of his car being used to aid Sir Charles, how do you make the Rolls arrive at the Corner in time? It could never keep up with, let alone beat, the 'Moth' on a cross-country trip like this."

"Oh, that's simple, Superintendent. He didn't use the car lights to land by. He dropped a magnesium flare."

It was left for Hunt to fall into the trap the Chief Constable had so cunningly laid.

"Can you find a flaw this time, Inspector?" Major Williams inquired.

Hunt smiled good-naturedly. "I must apologise again, sir, for my contrariness," he said, "but I'm afraid I can."

"And this time?"

"Quite a glaring mistake. You say that Newton and Mrs. Evans walked over to the hedge by which the constable's body lay *from* the spot where the 'planes had turned to take off.

"Now, as the wind was blowing from a southwesterly direction, the 'Moth,' in order to take off against it, would commence its run in the northeast corner of the meadow. That is, of course, from the corner

nearest to where the dead convict's body was found in the hut.

"To walk from there to the hedge they would have to walk diagonally almost the whole length of the pasture—"

He paused, and looked at the Chief Constable, as though to give him a chance to see for himself the error into which he had fallen.

But the latter did not avail himself of the opportunity.

"What difference does that make?" he innocently asked. "That's just the way I thought they came."

"All the difference in the world," replied Hunt quickly. "*They* couldn't have walked—*there was only one set of footprints.*"

"No," said the Chief Constable quietly. "That's just it. *They didn't* walk!—I never said they did. *She fainted, and he carried her all the way.*"

"Carried her?" echoed Hunt. "Of course. That's the explanation I've been looking for. Well," he added laughingly, "you've certainly shown *me* up this time, sir."

"And so you find no fault, Inspector?"

"No! I can't see any harm in us working on *those* lines. It's the best bit of reasoning we've had so far. . . . There's only one feature I dislike about it—there seem too many in the plot! Just count them up. Young Evans, his wife, Newton, Day, and the crew of the yacht—then possibly an intermediary between Newton and the Evanses."

Before the Chief Constable could comment on this, a constable knocked at the door.

"Come in!" rapped out Walker in a businesslike manner.

As the man walked across the room they could see that he held an envelope in his hand.

"With Sergeant Smith's compliments," he said, passing the missive over to Hunt. "It has just come in over the 'phone."

He withdrew quietly as Hunt ran his finger under the still moist flap.

Inside was a single sheet of paper, addressed to him, marked, "Received by 'phone, Armoury Department, New Scotland Yard."

The message was brief but emphatic.

"Both bullets submitted .22 calibre. Both undoubtedly fired same barrel."

With a grin of satisfaction the Inspector passed the sheet over to Major Williams.

"We shall have to work on my second theory in any case after this," the Chief Constable remarked. "It entirely disproves my first."

He passed the message on to Walker and turned back to Hunt. "What's to happen to Bailey—are we justified in keeping him in custody a little longer?"

"Oh, yes. I should say we are *justified*—but I doubt if it is necessary. I think we've got the truth, and he's not likely to bolt now, so we shall be able to get in touch with him easily should we want him. . . . He'll have to appear in court again. I suppose you can fix the question of bail quite easily?"

"Oh, yes. That can no doubt be arranged."

"In that case, let's have him in. A few more questions won't hurt him, and if the replies are satisfactory he'll soon be free to go."

It was a much brighter man who came to them now. He guessed that the end of this interview would see him virtually a free man.

Hunt again took up the questioning. "Now about your brother," he began. "Had he by any chance any knowledge of aircraft?"

The answer was what he had expected. "No! No knowledge of flying at all; he was a compositor when he was in a job."

"And now one other important question—did your brother ever meet either Mr. or Mrs. Evans?"

"No, not to my knowledge. In fact, I think I can say, definitely, no."

A few more questions of similar reckoning failed to shake the man's denials, so Hunt turned again to the evidence given by the mechanic at the inquest.

Again the prisoner was adamant. His answers to questions dealing with the start of the flight never varied from the original ones in the slightest degree.

At last, seeing that he was only wasting time by persisting, Hunt told the man he would be free to go as soon as the necessary formalities had been complied with. Whether the Chief Constable intended to prosecute him later on another charge he was not in a position to state, he added, as the constable who had been summoned escorted him out.

"Going back to the subject under discussion before my constable disturbed us with your message," started the Chief Constable. "If you think there were too many in the plot for my theory to be cor-

rect, and yet still think my line of reasoning to be the right one, how do you reconcile your two statements?"

Hunt was toying with a pen on the desk before him. After a moment he replied:

"I think Evans was undoubtedly the murderer! Until just now I was puzzled as to how he could have been, but I'm beginning to see daylight. . . . This, broadly speaking, is my theory:

"The 'planes started from Forest Court as Bailey said—Sir Charles and Mrs. Evans in the 'Moth' and Dennis Evans alone in his little white monoplane.

"Dennis Evans took off first, you'll remember. I suggest he kept the lead until he was over Angels, where he feigned engine trouble. Dropping a flare, he glided to earth.

"Sir Charles, seeing his friend in trouble, landed to help him. . . . Once on the ground, I think, Evans ran his 'plane back up the field, turning again for the take-off in the north-east corner. Sir Charles probably did the same with the 'Moth'!

"Then, before Sir Charles could get out of his 'plane, Evans came over and fired the fatal shot.

"Next, he would have started his own 'plane off *empty*, and a little later the 'Moth' would have been made to follow suit—carrying, of course, the body of Sir Charles.

"I've made inquiries and ascertained that both the 'Moth' and Evans' little monoplane are so easy to handle that, *given suitable conditions*, they would take off unpiloted when their lowest flying speed was reached.

"As you realise, they had more than enough room

to reach their flying-speed in Angels, and I think we can say quite safely that the conditions *were* suitable.

"The unforeseen misadventure of the 'Moth' catching fire was, of course, a serious matter for the Evanses. Had all gone well, the 'planes would have both gone down in the sea, probably hundreds of miles from land, and sunk without leaving a trace.

"Everyone would have thought that the three of them had met with disaster through their folly in flying over the sea in the darkness of the early morning.

"No suspicion of what had really taken place would have been in anybody's mind—excepting, of course, the accomplice waiting at Totland Corner.

"The difficulty of there being only one set of foot-prints is explained satisfactorily now. Evans carried his wife.

"The only snag that I can see is this—can we connect Day definitely with the case? If not, we've got to find the unknown who was waiting with the car. And if it wasn't Day, who was it?

"The constable," he added, "was killed because he had seen too much. In all probability Evans knew the policeman by sight, and guessed that he himself was known to the constable by name.

"This shooting did not complicate matters though, as they had left no clue, and, were it not for the discovery of the bullet in Sir Charles' remains, no one would have connected the two tragedies.

"Then to add more mystery to an already mysterious affair, I'm afraid the cows churned up the corner of the meadow where Evans walked backwards

and forwards in sending off the unpiloted 'planes, and so destroyed all traces."

"That's more like it, Inspector," agreed the Chief Constable enthusiastically. "You don't need half the number of people in your theory, and, after hearing it, I'm afraid mine must have sounded a bit thin.

"It's obvious that the most important thing to do now is trace this car they used. It would be the one I crossed off my list as out of the case, as its tracks were overrun by those of the Bentley. . . . The other few tracks, you'll remember, were all accounted for."

Hunt looked across at the Chief Constable rather shamefacedly. "After all my experience of police work, I feel I ought to be kicked," he admitted. "I didn't trouble myself over those tracks at all—and I have only the haziest recollection of them. I believe I observed they were made by a fairly large car, but I'm not even sure of that."

"Never mind," said the Chief Constable cheerfully. "We're companions in crime. I didn't worry about them either. . . . We shall have to get on without them."

Just then a car drew up outside the station. Recognising the driver, a Poole police inspector, the Superintendent excused himself and left the room.

In less than a minute he was back again. Popping his head just round the door, he exclaimed excitedly, "Sensation follows sensation, it's news of Evans! I'll show the skipper in."

XV

PRO PATRIA

ABOUT the time that "the skipper" was being ushered into the little room at Bournemouth, where the Chief Constable and Hunt were seated, the telephone bell on the desk of Detective Inspector Whitfield of the C.I.D. began to ring violently.

Putting down the pen with which he was preparing a report with meticulous care, the Inspector picked up the receiver.

The call was from Sir James Spreadbury, the Chief Commissioner.

Whitfield's presence was, he learned, required immediately.

Blotting his report carefully, he folded it up and locked it away in his desk. This interesting document showed the result of three months' labour expended in the search for the ringleaders of the Tottenham Court Road dope gang. And this record, as Whitfield himself would have been the first to admit, *did not* show the amount of progress the police desired.

Sir James, a prematurely grey but otherwise youngish-looking man of splendid physique, was wearing an extremely puzzled expression when the Inspector knocked at his door, before many minutes had elapsed.

"Take a seat, Inspector," he began, in his cultured manner. "I want a little talk with you. How much more progress have you made with this dope case?"

Whitfield considered for a moment before replying. "Candidly, sir, I can't say that we've got any farther at all," he said at length. "In fact, I'm afraid we're rather worse off than we were when last I reported. From confidential reports that we've received, it appears that the Tottenham Court Road gang are doing more business than ever.

"Of course that's only to be expected. With the Chelsea gang practically wiped out of existence, the trade is bound to pass to Gascoigne's crush."

"So you still think that Gascoigne is one of the ringleaders?" inquired the Chief Commissioner, with something of a smile playing about his lips.

"I'm sure of it, sir. Everywhere we go we run up against the man. He's been seen in the company of Schwartz a couple of times lately, and, as you know, we have enough evidence to put Schwartz away for some years any time we want to use it. But, as you agree, it suits our purpose to let Schwartz go free. He is more likely to lead us eventually to 'the boss' than any other man we know.

"Then take Barnes. Any time we want to pull him in I'll guarantee we should find the stuff on him. What does Gascoigne want with a man of Barnes' reputation?"

"Before he got in with the Court Road gang, what was he? A little sneak-thief down by the docks. And look at him now, dining at the Frivolity more evenings than not and running a Rolls with a liveried chauffeur.

"But that's not all. I could name a dozen more, both known and suspected members of the gang—and Gascoigne knows them—every one."

"Yes," commented the Chief. "He certainly mixes with a deuced funny crowd—but that in itself's not a sin. What do you know of him otherwise?"

"Not a lot," admitted the Inspector. "In spite of the most exhaustive inquiries, his past remains wrapped in mystery. . . . He seems to have plenty of money, and is a member of two otherwise respectable clubs.

"His latest flame is Marianne Barlow, the leading lady of *Rags and Tatters*, Merryweather's new show, but there my information ends.

"If only we had the help of 'Pro Patria,'" lamented the Inspector, "this gang would soon go the way of the Chelsea lot. Why ever he concentrates on the one gang I cannot imagine.

"A score of letters we must have had from him, and in every case his information has been proved correct. A man with his knowledge of the underworld must have got a line on the Court Road crowd. I'm half inclined to think he must be working for them himself. The demand for dope will still go on, and unless he helps us stamp out everybody in the game he's not really doing half the good he imagines he is."

"Have you never stopped to consider who 'Pro Patria' might be?" asked Sir James quietly.

"No," said the surprised Inspector. "I can't say I've given the matter much thought. To my mind, it seems better to act on his advice without question;

he's never let us down yet. If we start a hunt for him, we'll only defeat our own ends by putting him on his guard."

The Chief Commissioner was fumbling in a drawer. Presently he withdrew an envelope, the familiar colour and size of which told Whitfield at a glance the sender.

"Well, if we *had* decided to search for 'Pro Patria,' this letter would have saved us the trouble," the Chief declared, passing the missive over to the Inspector.

Whitfield studied the envelope carefully before withdrawing the contents.

It bore all the usual characteristics of a "Pro Patria" letter. The typewritten address was to the Chief Commissioner himself, and the envelope was marked "Personal."

The blurred I's showed the same faulty typewriter had been used as on all other occasions, while the postmark showed the letter to have been posted in the Hammersmith area that morning.

His scrutiny finished, the Inspector withdrew the enclosed sheet. He saw at once that the message was longer than usual.

"DEAR SIR JAMES," he read, "You will agree that with the help of my information you have successfully cleaned up the Chelsea gang of dope traffickers.

"There is, however, as I have no doubt you are well aware, an even more powerful gang operating in the neighbourhood of Tottenham Court Road.

"My investigations against this gang have been of a somewhat different nature, and I am glad to

be able to say that I have information of the greatest value.

"If, therefore, you would make it convenient for you personally to see me, I propose calling at the Yard to-morrow morning at 11, when I will place such information as I have in your hands. This will include the name of 'the boss' and several lesser members of the gang.

"Assuring you there can be no possibility of a mistake—"

And here the good man's eyes nearly popped out of his head, for underneath the typewritten "Pro PATRIA" was scrawled a signature—and the signature was that of Claude Gascoigne.

XVI

DEVELOPMENTS

"THE skipper" proved to be an elderly-looking man wearing a ragged blue jersey and rubber thigh-boots. He carried an old, greasy yachting cap, which he twirled nervously in his hands, and as he bid the Chief Constable (whom he evidently recognised) good evening, Hunt could see his teeth were uneven and tobacco-stained.

"Captain Matthews has news of the utmost importance for us," the Superintendent declared. "He happened to be fishing out beyond his usual limits or he would not have seen what he did. . . . But he'd best tell you the story with his own lips. Take a seat, captain—and help yourself to a cigarette," he added, pushing the box over to him.

The old mariner accepted the offer of a smoke, and, after lighting the cigarette, sat back in his chair, his uneasiness fast disappearing.

"This is Inspector Hunt of Scotland Yard," said the Chief Constable, introducing the detective. "You can tell your story without letting his presence upset you. As a matter of fact, he is in charge of the case."

"That's all right," replied the fisherman. "What I've got to say can be said afore anywun; it can't harm nobody!"

"My name, as Inspector 'Aydon from Poole, 'im

what brought me 'ere, will tell you, is Joe Matthews. I'm skipper of the *Kathleen Norris*. She's a little thirty-foot fishin'-smack, as nice a tub as ever sailed out uf Poole 'Arbour.

"My crew is y'ung Jim Brown an' 'Arry Bowman, but they 'ad ter stop an' 'ang the nets out. I ought ter be there 'elpin' 'em by all rights, but when I 'appens ter tell P.C. Coggins what we'd see'd 'e 'urries me off ter the police stashun ter see Inspector 'Aydon, 'oo sez, 'Yer must cum with me ter Bournemouth an' let 'em know about it up there!'"

After a slight pause, he began the story proper:

"It 'appens as we wuz tryin' fur new fishin'-grounds well out uf the bay. We left Poole about three o'clock on Monday arternoon.

"We kept the sails up an' used our little motur as well, as we wanted ter get as fur out as possible by dark.

"We finally fetched up at a spot about fifty mile out in the Channel; a few mile west uf Swanage as near as I can say.

"We 'adn't bin this fur out afore, but we 'ad 'eard it sed that there wus a 'ole in the sea-bed there, if anywun cud strike it, which wus full uf fish.

"We didn't 'ave no luck at furst. Time an agen we dropped our nets, but we didn't ketch no fish until, just as day wus breakin', we got among 'em.

"We wus busy 'aulin' in about four o'clock when we 'eard the 'um of an airyplane.

"Thinkin' it wur funny ter 'ear wun so fur out at sea an' at sich an early 'our, we all on us looked rounne ter see where the noise wur comin' from.

"We saw the machin' at wunce—it wur a good way orf, coming out from the land.

"Then, as we watched, all uf a sudden 'is engine spluttered an' stopped. But the airyplane still kept cumin' on. A little white single-winged un, it wur.

"Straight at us it come, gittin' lower an' lower, till we made sure it 'ud be on top of us.—So it wud 'ave bin tew, only it dropped short. . . . About fifty yards away frum us it 'it the water an' started goin' downe slowly straight away.

"We 'ad ter finish pullin' in the nets, but that didn't take long, an' in a very short time we turned the *Kathleen Norris* about an' ran alon'side.

"We knew the airmun couldn't 'ave bin 'urt as it only dropped gently into the sea. To our 'orror, tho', there weren't nobody in it! . . .

"The part where 'e sat 'adn't sunk yet, but it wur empty, we could see.

"Anyhow, ter make sure I stood up in the boat an' looked right down ter the bottom uf ther—ther—" He searched for a word.

"Cockpit," suggested Hunt.

"Yes, cockpit, I believe that's what you calls it. Anyway, it weren't no good. There weren't nobody in it.

"We waited by a good 'our ter see if 'is body wud cum floating up, but no. He weren't never in it when it 'it the sea."

He felt in his pocket and produced a grimy piece of paper. "Jim Brown, he writ this downe fur yer—it's the readin' un the wings. I b'aint no scholar, so I doant know what it means."

Hunt took the paper from him. He saw at

once that it was the registration number of the 'plane. In a bold, copperplate hand were pencilled the mystic letters GE—EXXGF, and the number 870/0076591.

With a sense of elation, Hunt realised that these signs would prove beyond doubt whether the 'plane was Evans' or not. If, as he himself felt certain, it was, the fact that it had come down empty seemed to prove his latest theory to be correct. The police would be justified in applying for a warrant for Evans' arrest without waiting for further evidence.

"I'll keep this, if I may," he said, pocketing the document. "It's a most valuable piece of evidence. And now, gentlemen, don't you think that we have earned a drink? Let's all take a walk across to the 'Crown.' "

The others agreed that this was a jolly good idea, and the entire party proceeded to the hotel, where they found the Inspector from Poole already installed.

Then, after a couple of drinks apiece, the gathering dispersed, Hunt to drive back to his sister's at Southbourne, and the Chief Constable and Superintendent to complete the formalities that would enable Bailey to secure his release.

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The next morning again saw the indefatigable Hunt up betimes. After a brisk walk along the sands by a sea as calm as a mill-pond, he returned to eat a hearty breakfast before going on to Bournemouth to begin the serious work of the day.

The Superintendent, he found, was already at

work in his office, but the Chief Constable had not yet put in an appearance.

Walker greeted him warmly. "Still no news of importance, no trace of Evans or his wife—and, as I've heard nothing from Forest Court, I presume the vanished Sir Henry Sandleson has not done a spectacular reappearing trick."

"Too bad," murmured Hunt, "but we can't expect jam on it every time—and, I think, we really did do a good day's work yesterday."

"Yes, I suppose we did; we certainly were busy enough," admitted the Superintendent. "But still," he added, "we've got to do better or we shall soon have the newspapers on our track. They're full of the case this morning. 'The "Moth" Murder Mystery,' they call it, and a good name too—but I think, if we have our fair share of luck, they'll soon be able to cut the mystery part out of it."

"I hope so," echoed Hunt, "and *I* think so too. Did you arrange to get the warrant this morning?"

"Yes. I hope to get it signed straight away. A doctor J.P. is calling in on his way by. Now, there's one minor matter to which my attention has been drawn. It may have something to do with our case, and it may not. I don't know quite what to think, but I thought I'd bring it to your notice.

"A Mrs. Thornton, of Park View, a large house just past Forest Court, going out on the main road, has reported that her Singer six saloon, number RU 9081, has been stolen from her garage at the side of the house.

"It appears she left the house on Thursday last for a long week-end in Town. On returning yes-

terday, she found the garage had been entered and her car taken.

"There were no servants in the house from Friday evening to yesterday morning, Mrs. Thornton having given them a few days' holiday.

"A peculiar feature of the theft is that the garage lock shows no signs of having been tampered with. Mrs. Thornton is certain that she locked the door, and the servants verify this, as they tried all the doors—including the garage one—before leaving on Friday. It seems the thief, or thieves, must either have possessed a key, or have been unusually careful in picking the lock.

"This is what comes of people building houses in such out-of-the-way places," he complained, "and to go away and leave valuable property unprotected is inviting trouble of this sort," he grumbled.

"Are there no other houses in the vicinity?" Hunt inquired. "I haven't been any farther along the road than Forest Court, so I'm not familiar with the district."

"No—the next house is a good mile down the road."

"I suppose the full description has been circularized to all stations?"

"Oh, yes—Lymington saw to that last night. I have it here—somewhere." He went through some papers on the desk and produced a typewritten copy. "I'll read it out:

"'Stolen from Park View, near Lymington, Hants, some time between Friday the 19th and

Wednesday the 24th of May last: Grey Singer, six cylinder, four-door saloon. Registration No. RU 9081. Engine No. L 2254/905281. Chassis No. BJ/4085/71132.' "

"We can't do any more," remarked Hunt. "I suppose it'll turn up again. It's surprising how few cars disappear entirely." Then inquiringly:

"What's the programme to-day, Superintendent?"

"Oh, that's for you to decide. I have nothing special on to-day. I shall be able to lend you a hand until tea-time, at least."

"Well, I've been thinking we ought to find out just where our Mr. Day spent the early hours of Tuesday morning. As he has probably returned home, this will mean a trip to Town, I'm afraid. I have his address in my pocket-book, so I think I ought to 'phone him for an appointment," answered Hunt at length.

"Yes—that does seem the next step, Inspector. Although it'll take up more than half the day, it can't be helped. Even if he has a perfectly satisfactory answer, it'll mean crossing yet another name off our list of suspects, and so narrow down the channels of our inquiry. And that'll be better than remaining at a standstill."

Hunt was reaching for the 'phone when Walker interrupted.

"Wait a minute," he said, "here's the Chief Constable. He's got another fisherman with him. I wonder what's turned up now?"

Hunt turned, and looked out of the window.

The Chief Constable, followed by the fisherman

Walker had indicated, was walking across the road from his car.

He seemed in good spirits, for his face was clothed in smiles and his attitude was that of a man who has received good news.

He passed out of sight beneath the window, then, a few seconds later, flung open the office door.

He was plainly excited; even his military training did not enable him to conceal the fact.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he began. "Although it seems I'm not the early bird, I think it's me who's caught the worm.

"This gentleman"—he indicated the fisherman—"came to my house early this morning—before I was up, in fact—and he has brought us news of the utmost importance.

"It's news of Evans and his wife—both alive and kicking!"

XVII

AT THE BUNGALOW

HUNT looked across at the Superintendent. "News of the Evanses, eh! My word, Major Williams certainly has caught the first worm, and a mighty fat worm too, while we poor early birds haven't even had a peck at one."

The newcomer had already taken the chair indicated by the Chief Constable, and Hunt studied him intently as he lit the cigarette that Walker, showing his usual generosity towards witnesses, had thrust upon him.

He was quite a young man, handsome in a coarse kind of way, and showed, the Yard man noticed, a stubble of at least three days' growth on his chin.

He wore similar garb to the visitor of the previous evening, but his high, rubber thigh-boots showed more signs of wear.

The colour of his nose suggested a liking of alcohol, and, truth to tell, his breath was tainted with the odour of stale beer. But it was his eyes that completed Hunt's unfavourable opinion of him; an opinion that had its beginnings as soon as he crossed the threshold. For his eyes were narrow, ferrety, and shifty-looking.

The Chief Constable briefly explained how Birch—for that, it transpired, was the man's name—came to his house that morning and told him he had a

story to tell, but for his own safety could only tell it in confidence, and if promised full forgiveness for his misdeeds.

After being assured that these misdeeds were not so very serious, the Chief Constable had, he said, given Birch a definite promise that any evidence he had to give that incriminated him would not be used against him.

"I find myself entirely justified by this somewhat irregular undertaking," he concluded, "for Birch's story may prove to be of incalculable value." Then:

"Now, Birch, tell the Inspector what you saw at daybreak Tuesday morning."

The fisherman looked across at Hunt.

"If I tell you the whole story, I suppose the Chief Constable's promise holds good? I don't altogether trust you plain-clothes blokes," he started, with something approaching a smile. The question was evidently meant without the malice which could easily be read into the words.

"Certainly! If the Chief Constable is prepared to overlook your sins, whatever they may be, it's not for me to interfere," replied Hunt readily.

"Well, as long as I know, that's all right. Here goes.

"On Monday night I went out to do a bit of river-fishing up the Avon, towards Ringwood. I'd better tell you first, I suppose, where I live—that's Christchurch—alongside the river, upstream of the main road.

"I keep a little sailin'-boat moored at the bottom of my garden, and as the river is pretty wide I use it quite a lot. On Monday night there was hardly

any wind, though we 'ad 'ad a bit of a storm earlier, but I found just enough to carry me slowly up the river.

"As soon as I got clear of the town I dropped a spinner over in the hopes h'of pickin' up a stray salmon. As you gentlemen know, there's folks that see harm in that an' call it poachin'," he added unnecessarily.

"Well, as it happens, I 'ad a bit of luck and got a couple of nice ones about seven or eight miles upstream. The time, when I hooked my second, was about three o'clock. . . .

"As this seemed a good spot, I sailed backwards and forwards for more'n an hour, but I didn't get another. As it was starting to get light, I decided to pull in my line an' turn for home.

"I 'adn't gone more'n a mile 'fore I came to a stretch where there are half a dozen summer bungalows on the bank.

"There was, I saw to my surprise, a car drawn up outside the nearest one. They all 'ave their own drive down from the road, which is only fifty yards away," he explained.

"That's funny,' I said to myself; 'I wonder who that can be?' It was moonlight when I passed on my way upstream, an' I knew that the car wasn't there then.

"I used to come up this way a lot the summer before, an' I knew the end bungalow belonged to Mr. Evans—'Myns Abass'—I remember the name. It struck me as bein' comic.

"It wasn't no business of mine, though, an' I shouldn't 'ave thought no more about it, but just

as I drew level a lady an' gentleman came out.

"I couldn't see the lady properly, as she turned her back on me to lock the door. But I did see the gentleman. I saw him plainly. I was Mr. Evans. An' the lady, judgin' by her figur', I took to be Mrs. Evans.

"Neither of them 'appened ter notice me, an' I should have soon forgotten all about it, only I 'eard later what 'ad 'appened on the 'Ead.

"Then, when I 'eard about that chauffeur bloke bein' pulled in for murder, I said to the missus, 'Ere's a nice mess to be in, to be sure. There's something fishy goin' on here, I'm certain. What am I to do? If I don't go to the police, an innocent bloke'll most likely get 'ung, an' if I do go, I shall get put back in jug.'

"'Owever my missus said, 'You go and see the Chief Constable 'isself, an' if you put it to 'im that he'll get nothing by juggin' you he may let you orf.'

"I put orf comin' all day yesterday, then I couldn't bear waitin' no longer.

"'Righto, Katie,' I said. 'I'll get up early an' do as you say!' That's 'ow I come to be 'ere."

The importance of this statement could not, as the Chief Constable had said, be estimated. It would be one of the main weapons in the hands of the prosecution.

"Thank goodness you came," remarked the Inspector. "And now for a few questions. . . .

"Did you notice the size and colour of the car?"

"Yes. I noticed it was one I 'adn't seen there before. It was greyish in colour and quite a decent size."

"A saloon, of course?"

"Yes. It was a closed-in one."

"Did you notice whether there was anyone waiting in it?"

"No. I couldn't see. It was turned back to me—ready to go out again; if there was anybody in it, I shouldn't have been able to see them."

This answer was not at all satisfactory, but Hunt realised that the car must have been seen later on the road. Given luck, he would be able to find someone who remembered how many occupants it had.

"Well, then, if you didn't notice that, perhaps you will be able to help me here. Was either Mr. Evans or the lady we take to be his wife carrying any luggage?"

Birch thought for a moment. "Yes," he replied. "Now I come to think of it, Mr. Evans was. He was carrying a little portmanteau."

"A blue one?" put in Hunt quickly.

"No, not blue. I remember distinctly now. It was brown."

"Brown, eh!" Hunt thought for a moment. This was not the answer he had expected. Presently he continued:

"Have you ever seen the car *anywhere* before?"

Birch considered for quite a minute. "No. I can't say definitely that I 'ave; there's so many about like it."

"You've never seen it coming from Lymington by any chance? a woman drives it."

The Chief Constable was listening wonderingly. What game was the Yard man playing? He began to feel that he hadn't been the only one to catch a

worm after all. Birch's answer settled his doubts. It was plain that Hunt had scored again.

"Blimey, Sergeant," he said, reducing Hunt in rank unwittingly, "you're right. I remember now. Wait a bit. I'll tell you 'er name." He scratched his head vigorously, as if to help refresh his memory.

"Damme, I've 'eard it somewhere. Mrs. Thornley—no, not Thornley—I've got it—Thornton! That's it—Mrs. Thornton."

"Quite correct," smiled Hunt. "Mrs. Thornton of Park View." Then, seeing the look of astonishment growing on the Chief Constable's face, he could not refrain from adding, "It's a Singer six, registration number RU 9081."

Pen in hand, he picked up the official description of the car that the Lymington police had circulated.

"Get this out again at once, with this addition," he commanded the Superintendent.

The words he wrote were but few. Just—"Hold the occupants on a charge of murder." "And, whilst you're out there," he added, indicating the outer office, "send out a full description of both the Evanses, and ask for a close watch to be kept on all ports."

The Chief Constable looked up at Hunt. "Don't you think a trip to the bungalow will be worth while?" he inquired.

"Yes, certainly—and after that I'm going to search Moorlands from top to bottom, even if I have to get a warrant."

"There'll be no need for that. I've always found Davis most obliging."

"He's got to be," said Hunt grimly. "It's a mat-

ter of time being everything now; the longer start they get the harder they'll be to trace. I'm afraid we shall find that they've dumped the Singer long ago.

"If only you'd come before," he added reproachfully to Birch; then more brightly, seeing the man looked a little hurt, "Never mind, better late than never, I suppose."

They moved out from the office to where the Superintendent stood talking to an elderly, professional-looking gentleman.

"This is Dr. Burroughs," Walker began, on seeing Hunt approaching. "Allow me to introduce you. He has come to sign the warrants—we shall want two now, I'm afraid."

A few minutes later, the formalities completed, warrants signed, and descriptions being flashed throughout the land, the officials were free to start their journey.

A quarter of an hour's drive brought them to the bungalow.

They had no key, but Hunt produced a couple of oddly bent pieces of wire from his pocket, and after a couple of minutes' work on the lock the door swung open.

It seemed the journey had been in vain. Few traces of the brief visit of the owners were to be seen.

The scanty furniture that had been left there for the winter was thickly covered with dust, and the atmosphere of the damp rooms was cold and uninviting. It was obvious that the place had been unoccupied for some considerable time.

It was only in the dining-room that definite proof of the supposed visit was to be found. Here, in the grate, a heap of ashes showed some papers to have recently been burned.

Hunt bent down and gently lifted a few of the larger fragments with a pair of small tweezers. All he could say, though, after a most careful examination, was that they were the remains of a newspaper, probably the *Daily Mail*.

"We'll take these along with us," he said, "but I don't think we shall learn much from them."

After noting that one corner of the table had been used as a chair, and that the mirror over the fireplace had been wiped, they agreed that the place had shown them all the clues it had to offer, and, after relocking the door, turned their attention to the gravel drive.

Here the tracks of a car were plainly visible. Following them, Hunt found that they turned right for Christchurch when they reached the main road. "Gone to Town, for a fiver," he said.

"And now Moorlands?" queried the Chief Constable, climbing into his car.

"Yes, sir. And as fast as we can get there."

Davis was as obliging as possible. When Hunt explained the reason of the visit, he offered to show them round himself.

As at Forest Court, they started their search in the attic.

But here they found no well-equipped workshops and highly interesting museums.

Instead, just the usual ill-lit storage-place of years of accumulated rubbish.

"Nothing worth worrying about up here," remarked Hunt after a moment. "Come on—let's proceed."

The servants' quarters on the next floor they left unlooked at. Passing them quickly, they came to the bedrooms.

Mrs. Evans' was the first to be visited. A little bureau holding her private correspondence was ruthlessly forced. A hurried look through some of her letters gave Hunt the impression that they were valueless. But he was leaving nothing to chance. How often he had found the most innocent-looking documents to contain a vital clue.

Borrowing an attaché-case, he slipped them inside, after having first sealed them in a large envelope on which he wrote: "Mrs. Evans' Bureau."

Then on to Mr. Evans' room. Nothing here, it seemed. Just a bed, a couple of chairs, dressing-table, washstand, and chest of drawers.

He ran quickly through the drawers. "Hardly any clothes here," he observed.

Davis explained. All Mr. Evans' suits had gone to Plymouth. In fact, the only one that had not was the one the wanted man was wearing. The valet described it. "Single-breasted, of reddish-brown material, with a slight pin-stripe."

The dressing table next claimed Hunt's attention.

In the second drawer he opened there lay a typewritten envelope. He snatched it up eagerly. To his disappointment it did not contain a letter. Instead, only an assortment of various sized suction pads for an upper dental-plate.

He flung it back, exasperated, and continued.

A few bills in one of the small side-drawers went the way of the letters in Mrs. Evans' bureau.

Then to the other bedrooms. Each was unoccupied, so the inspection was but brief. None of them offered a clue.

Evans' study was the first ground-floor room to be examined. The desk here would not yield to Hunt's wire and had to be forced. There was singularly little correspondence in it. What there was he hurriedly docketed and slipped into the bag.

The other rooms were soon disposed of. Quick as the search was, it was thorough. Even the house-keeping bills and account-books were carried off.

"Where to now?" asked the Chief Constable as they finished the task. "Back to the station?"

"Yes. We must try to sort out these"—indicating the contents of the bag—"but I'm afraid we shall be interrupted by news of the finding of the car."

XVIII

THE HUNT BEGINS IN EARNEST

BACK at the station, the officials set about the always unpleasant business of prying into other people's correspondence. Even though he was certain that she was a murderess, Hunt felt a slight feeling of revulsion as he began to read carefully the letters he had taken from Mrs. Evans' bureau.

Most of them were of comparatively recent receipt, some of them being business letters from her dressmakers and hairdressers, others invitations to various social events and dances, while several were from an unknown Biddy, who, it seemed, had been enjoying a most profitable run of luck at Monte Carlo.

All of them, however, made most uninteresting reading to an outsider, and Hunt was not sorry when he put down the last of the loose ones.

Only a small bundle now remained. These were tied neatly with blue ribbon. As he began to untie them, he thought of the words of the still popular waltz:

*Some letters tied with blue,
A photograph or two,
I see a rose from you,
Among my souvenirs.*

Were these, he wondered, souvenirs—the passionate love-letters of some still remembered swain?

The bundle untied, he picked up the first one. It

was over three years old, but the writing, he thought, seemed familiar.

"My Own Darling Peggy," it began, and appeared to continue in the same romantic strain.

After reading a few lines, he turned to the back page. He saw at once what he had half expected to see. The writer had been the late Sir Charles Stafford.

Putting it down, he picked up the next. The handwriting was similar. A hurried inspection showed him that all the others originated from the same source, and all, he saw, were couched in the same terms of endearment—"Sweetheart of all my Dreams"; "Wonderful One"; "My Own Glorious Little Girl"—to quote but few as examples.

"Perhaps there's a clue here, after all," he said aloud.

"What have you found?" asked the Superintendent, looking up. "Love-letters?"

"Yes," replied Hunt. "Love-letters—but the most recent is over three years old."

He settled down again to read through the sentimental "nothings" a man will always write to the woman he fancies himself in love with.

But what he read had little bearing on the case. There was no hint of a quarrel, nothing to show what had occurred to upset the plans of an early marriage that the dead man spoke so enthusiastically of.

Baffled, Hunt retied the letters with their ribbon, and set to work on a batch he picked from the others still in the bag.

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Promptly as Big Ben chimed the hour of eleven Claude Gascoigne came to Scotland Yard. A police constable immediately ushered him into the presence of the Chief Commissioner.

Sir James Spreadbury greeted him warmly; almost with brotherly affection.

"So you're the gentleman to whom we owe so much—" he began.

But Gascoigne waved him down. "It was nothing, Sir James," he said, "nothing at all. . . . Any other decent-minded Britisher, given the opportunity, would have done the same.—I had that opportunity—that was all."

"Well, I'm glad you *did* get the opportunity, Mr. Gascoigne. How you got it I do not intend to inquire, but I will say, in passing, that for a long time past your comings and goings have been regarded with curiosity, not to say suspicion, by my men."

"I am well aware of it, Sir James, well aware of it. In fact, on one or two occasions their presence has, metaphorically speaking, almost resulted in the killing of the goose that lays the golden egg. But I came here to give you valuable information, and so, as I'm a busy man, I propose to waste no time. No one can hear us in here?" he inquired questioningly.

"No, no one, Mr. Gascoigne; the walls are absolutely sound-proof, and, as you can see, there's no one here but us," replied the Chief Commissioner. He did not think it necessary to explain that all that was taking place was being recorded by a dictaphone.

"Very well then. As I have your assurance that

we cannot be overheard, I'll give you the names I promised. . . . You realise," he went on, taking a slip of paper from his notebook the while, "if it should ever leak out that Claude Gascoigne supplied this information, to-day will prove a very disastrous day for me. I never forget the ancient saying, 'Walls have ears,' and even Scotland Yard may have traitors within its gates, you know."

Then, reading from the list, he began: "These are the names of several prominent members of the gang. A man named Schwartz—I don't know his Christian name, but he is known as 'Issy' to his friends, and is, I believe, well known to the police.

"Wilfred Barnes—he drives about in his Rolls and runs an expensive flat in Knightsbridge.

"Jerry Scott and Lennox Hugonin—they're two ex-confidence men—and a couple of others of whom I know little save that their names are Brewer and McKenzie."

Sir James smiled grimly. Every one of the men whose names had been read out was a suspected trafficker.

"They are meeting to-night at eight o'clock at a house in Devonshire Avenue—No. 121, to be precise. A consignment of cocaine and heroin will be distributed on the premises.

"To get this information, I need hardly add, I have had to run the greatest risks. However, I am certain it is correct, so I hope you will use it to the best advantage and take them all red-handed."

"We shall—certainly. You can be assured of that," replied Sir James with enthusiasm. "I sup-

pose," he added, "we shall take the 'boss' there too?"

"I'm afraid not," corrected the other man.

"Not? Why not? Isn't he going to be there?"

"No—he won't be there." Then softly and slowly: "You see—he's dead."

"Dead," echoed Sir James. "You don't mean it!"

"Yes, dead. Murdered, in fact. *He was Sir Charles Stafford.*"

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Hardly had Hunt had time to scan the first of the letters taken from Evans' desk when the telephone bell rang. The Superintendent picked up the instrument.

"It's for you, Inspector," he said; "they've put it through from the outer office."

Sir James Spreadbury was on the other end of the wire.

In a very few moments he had told Hunt of Claude Gascoigne's amazing disclosures. "Apparently," he explained, "Sir Charles had been doing the smuggling himself, bringing the dope from the Continent by air."

He had taken little part in the actual distribution, but the method of this distribution had been devised by the dead man, who was the brains of the gang.

Only one or two of the heads knew who "the boss" was; although he was occasionally present at the meetings, he was always masked, and allowed no one to question his authority.

"He had us completely in the dark, you know," the Chief concluded, "and I'm wondering if his murder was due to his connection with the gang."

"Yes," replied Hunt, "I have every reason to think that it was. We know the murderer, Evans, for whose arrest we hold a warrant, is himself mixed up in some shady business. Do you think you can see Gascoigne again, and get him to do his utmost to find out whether Evans was in any way connected with the Chelsea crowd? We know for certain that Evans was being pushed out of business, and if we knew that he was in the dope game we should have our motive straight away. Not that we haven't a *prima facie* case against him already—we have—but we want to leave nothing to chance."

"I'll do the best I can," answered Sir James, "and in the meantime Gascoigne will have a 'shadow' following who will not leave him day or night."

"Neither Whitfield nor myself entirely trusts the man, in spite of his open-handed actions, and we both have a feeling that there's a lot more than meets the eye in his denunciations."

"A good idea," commented Hunt. "He may easily be paving the way for a gang of his own. Keep an eye on him by all means."

A brief review of the murder case by Hunt concluded the conversation, and he returned once more to the letters.

He was not allowed to work at them for long. The 'phone bell rang again, and this time Walker announced that a Swanage Inspector had arrived with Hunt's tramp. "They are showing him in at once," he added.

Almost immediately there was a knock at the door. The two new arrivals provided a striking contrast; the Inspector tall and generously proportioned, the

tramp a miserable-looking specimen of humanity, standing no more than four foot ten.

As soon as they were seated, the Inspector began: "We received your message warning us to look out for a man of the tramp class wearing an exceptionally large pair of boots for his size," he said, "and, acting on this information, P.C. Burgin stopped this fellow as he was coming into the town.

"It was soon obvious that he was the man you wanted to interview. . . . As I had to come this way, I brought him over with me."

The tramp, who said his name was Jack Jones, was able to tell his story in a fairly coherent manner.

On the previous Sunday, he related, he had set out from Southampton to walk to Plymouth, where he hoped he might find work. On Monday evening he came to the cattle-shelter near Redstock just as dusk began to fall.

To his surprise, he found the hut already had an occupant, and this other man, he discovered, was seriously ill.

It was his heart, he explained to the tramp, but he would not allow him to go for help, saying that he had been like it many times before and he knew from experience that the spasm would soon pass.

After an hour it did pass, but later another attack came on, and he died almost immediately. This would be just after midnight.

Seeing that he could do no more, he did not relish the idea of spending the night with the dead body, and decided to find another spot farther on.

Before leaving, however, he noticed that his dead companion's boots were considerably more service-

able than his own, so he decided to appropriate them.

He found, however, that they were much too large, and he had to stuff them with grass. This measure had the desired effect, and he set off again on his journey.

"The time then," he replied to Hunt's questioning, "was not quite 1 A.M."

He had immediately set off for Bournemouth, where he spent most of Tuesday asleep under a hedge, and then by easy stages tramped to Swanage, where he had been stopped by the police.

"Well, this clears Newton," the Superintendent remarked. "If he was dead at one o'clock he could not have had a hand in the affair."

"No," agreed the Chief Constable, "he couldn't. That's obvious."

Hunt, after inspecting the boots and satisfying himself that they could not have made the once mysterious single set of tracks, told the tramp to wait outside for a moment.

"What shall we give him?" he queried. "His evidence was not of much value, as we had already practically dismissed Newton from the case. Do you think a pound too much?"

"No," replied the Chief Constable. "That won't break us. I'll go and see what I can do about it."

He rose and passed out to another room.

He had hardly left when the 'phone bell rang again. This time what the Inspector heard told him the hunt was on in earnest.

The Singer had been traced to an all-night garage just outside Winchester. It had been left there by a lady and gentleman who had driven up early on

Tuesday morning and complained of engine trouble.

They had afterwards proceeded on their journey to Bath in a Morris Cowley two-seater they had borrowed for a day or two whilst the Singer was being put in order. The number of the Morris was, he learned, RU 9188.

The Chief Constable re-entered as Hunt was putting down the instrument.

On hearing the news, he was all for the three of them driving out to Winchester straight away.

This course was agreeable to the others, so, after giving orders for the Morris's number and description to be circulated, the three officials hurried to the Chief Constable's high-powered car.

"How far is it?" queried Hunt. "Forty miles?"

"Just over," answered the Chief Constable.

"Bet you five shillings you don't do it in an hour!"

The Chief Constable looked at Hunt. "Really you are a reckless devil, Inspector," he began. Then, slipping in his gears, "Righto! It's a bet."

XIX

THE SECRET CODE

ONE hour, four minutes, fifteen seconds later, the Chief Constable brought his car to a standstill outside McAndrew's All-Night Garage.

"You win, Inspector," he said, "but you wouldn't have done if it hadn't been for that confounded brewer's dray holding us up in Southampton."

The Inspector smiled. "Better luck next time," he said. "It was certainly a close shave for me."

Mr. McAndrew himself was in attendance at the garage, having been warned of the officials' impending arrival.

He invited them into his private office, where he produced a bottle of whisky and a syphon of soda-water.

He repeated the story of the fugitives' arrival over the drinks, and added that no trace of engine trouble in the Singer was to be found.

It was unfortunate that he had himself been at the garage at the time, he said, for had the petrol-pump attendant alone been in charge he would not have dared sanction the exchange of cars.

"I don't think it's made much difference," replied Hunt. "If they hadn't been able to leave the Singer here they would have dumped it somewhere else. They won't keep the Morris either," he added. "It'll turn up some time to-day."

"Now about the lady and gentleman. Do you recognise them from these photographs?" He handed the proprietor a couple of snaps he had found in Evans' desk.

The man looked at them intently for a minute or so. "It certainly is the man," he declared at length, "but I'm not at all sure about the woman. The lady in this photograph is a blonde; the lady in the car, I'm almost positive, was a brunette!"

"Dye," suggested the Superintendent.

"Yes—possibly," put in Hunt, "or, perhaps, a wig."

The telephone bell started to ring, cutting short any chance of further conversation.

The call was for the trio, from Bournemouth police station.

The Morris had been reported found abandoned near Surbiton railway station.

"Then they've got to Town," exclaimed Hunt. "We shall have the dickens of a job to find them now."

"Shall we follow them up?" asked the Chief Constable.

"We might as well," replied Hunt; "the stage seems set now for a scene in London."

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Two hours later found them in Surbiton police station. The story that the sergeant in charge had to tell was not at all helpful.

A patrolling constable had first noticed the car parked in Stourfield Drive at 9 A.M. on Tuesday morning. He had observed at frequent intervals

throughout the day that the car was still in the same place.

The drive is a cul-de-sac, the sergeant explained, and cars are frequently left there for hours at a time.

It was not until he was passing at midnight, off duty and in plain clothes, that the constable became suspicious, as the car lights were not switched on.

He reported the matter to the police station, and another constable was detailed to keep an eye on it for an hour or two, and then, if no one turned up to claim it, he was to drive it to the police station.

No one had turned up, so the car had come into the possession of the police. Neither had anyone reported its loss, and they were in the act of tracing it when Hunt's message had come to hand.

As this was all the help the local police were able to give, Hunt suggested that it might pay them to make inquiries at the railway station in the hopes that someone may have remembered seeing the Evanses there.

But although they interviewed every official who had been on duty that Tuesday morning, including a couple of porters who were away from work and had to be called from their beds, no one could definitely remember the couple.

The only slender clue they obtained was that a man who appeared somewhat agitated had taken a couple of tickets for Kingston at approximately 8.45 A.M. on Tuesday. He had a lady companion, the booking-clerk noticed, and, as far as he could recollect, they were carrying two or three suit-cases.

The Chief Constable and Walker thought it might

pay them to go along to Kingston to see if any further trace of the couple could be picked up there, but Hunt decided to go straight to the Yard and get as many men as he could out on the search. So, after arranging to meet at ten o'clock that evening at a hotel Hunt mentioned (situated close to the Yard), the party split up; Hunt leaving by train, and the others going on in the car.

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Back at the Yard, Hunt went along to see the Chief Commissioner immediately.

When Sir James heard that the wanted couple had reached Town, he gave orders that every man who could be spared was to concentrate on a search of the hotels. Meanwhile Hunt's two snaps were to be enlarged, and the photos, with as detailed a description as it was possible to furnish, were to be sent out post haste to all stations.

By the time this had been done, and he had eaten a good square meal, Hunt realised that it was well past seven o'clock. He suddenly thought of the raid that was shortly to be made on the house in Devonshire Avenue, and decided that it might be worth his while to be present.

He hurried along to Detective-Inspector Whitfield's office and volunteered his services. Whitfield, who was glad to receive this unexpected offer, rapidly disclosed his plans.

The area containing the avenue was, he said, already surrounded, and the detectives were all armed. Whitfield obviously expected trouble.

A few minutes before eight o'clock three innocent-

looking vans drove leisurely out of Scotland Yard.

The first, containing Hunt and Whitfield, in addition to half a dozen beefy detectives, was to all appearances a greengrocer's delivery van. It bore on its green canvas covering, the words, "R. Simms: Fruiterer," and an address in Camden Town. From the outwardly decrepit state of the vehicle, passers-by were apt to infer that "R. Simms: Fruiterer," was not doing so well in business as he might. But had any of these speculating idlers seen the speed of the car when given full throttle, they would soon have changed their opinion.

The next car, in charge of Sergeant Grice, was to all intents and purposes the removal van of one "G. Wardle: Carrier." But the half-dozen occupants often found it their duty to remove more than mere furniture.

The third and last car, bearing the lettering and arms of one of the best-known firms in the grocery business, was both new and speedy. Its interior was divided into two compartments, the inner of which was wont to receive unwilling and unrepentant gentlemen who often tried to resort to violence. But its unyielding sides were, as many optimistic criminals had discovered, built of far tougher metal than the tin they appeared to be at first sight.

Before reaching their destination the three cars separated; Sergeant Grice's car going on down the main road past the avenue; drawing up, after following one or two short and twisty roads, almost immediately opposite the kitchen garden at the rear of No. 121.

Hunt's car followed more slowly, turning into the

avenue itself, and continuing down it at the same leisurely gait.

As it turned from the main road, Hunt noticed a match-seller, who was standing in the gutter, put his thumb up.

"O.K.," observed Whitfield, in the best talkie style. "They're there."

It was more than a coincidence that, as they reached a point just opposite No. 83, the supposed grocery van came into sight at the other end of the road. It was a distance of some fifty yards from No. 83 to No. 121, and from the latter to the end of the avenue another fifty.

The timing so far was perfect, and Hunt was comforted to know that by the time they reached the doorway, a party, some eight to ten strong, would be climbing quickly into the back garden.

In less time than it takes to tell, the cars drew up outside the house, a dozen or more men appearing in the roadway as if by magic.

Whitfield immediately took charge. After ineffectively trying the bell, he knocked authoritatively on the wooden panel of the door.

Still no answer—the house was as silent as the night.

After a moment he rapped again. "Open in the name of the law!" he demanded.

His voice brought the neighbours to their doors. "Get back in, and stay in," he advised. "There's going to be trouble here."

Seeing that no amount of knocking was going to procure the opening of the door, he beckoned three of his men forward.

"Down with it," he said, drawing his revolver to cover his men from possible attack.

A couple of hefty barges and the door swung open with a splintering crash.

The hall appeared deserted, so Whitfield beckoned all but four of his men forward.

A search of the downstairs rooms was of no avail; a betraying cigarette was still smouldering in an ash-tray, but the birds had flown.

Running up the stairs with half a dozen followers, Whitfield flung open the bedroom doors. But the first floor too was deserted.

There only remained the cellar now. It was there that they found them, every one of the men Gascoigne had named. But there was little fight in the gang; a tame ending to what had promised to be a hair-raising affair.

In a very short time the prisoners were handcuffed and brought into the light of the dining-room. They refused to admit that they had met to distribute dope, strenuously denying Whitfield's suggestion that any "snow" was concealed in the house.

This left the police no choice but to search the premises. It was some little time before the prohibited drugs came to light—stuffed well down behind the back and sides of a divan.

Without the finding of the dope the police had no case against the men, but the discovery of it sealed their fate.

And the men knew it. "That swine Gascoigne betraying his mates again," McKenzie swore under his breath.

But Hunt, who had remarkable hearing, caught the sentence.

"What do you know of Gascoigne?" he demanded of the man.

McKenzie remained dumb.

"Do you hear?" Hunt stormed, losing his temper at the sight of the other's insolent stare. "What do you mean by *again*?"

But still no answer. McKenzie apparently was determined not to speak.

Just then the detective who had been disguised as a match-seller entered. With him, hand-cuffed to him in fact, was an old lag, one Wallace Hayley.

This man, Hunt recalled, had long been a suspected member of the Chelsea gang. The police had "pulled him in" on more than one occasion lately, but had been unable to prove anything against him. If he was actually still in the game, it seemed he was being unusually cautious, for he had managed to keep out of serious trouble for at least four years.

"Saw this bird trying to slink by the top of the avenue," said the detective laconically, "and, as you told me to keep an eye open for suspicious characters, I went across to have a little chat with him. I didn't altogether like his manner, so I suggested a stroll down to see you, Inspector. He didn't like the idea, and tried to get funny, so I've had to bring him against his will."

Whitfield crossed over to the man. It was obvious that the latter was perturbed.

"What's the matter, Wally?" the Inspector began pleasantly. "You don't usually resent my presence as much as this. Perhaps you've something in your

pocket you wouldn't like me to see; eh? Love-letters, perhaps? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Wally, at your age—and with a dear trusting wife at home too." Hayley's domestic troubles were well known to the Inspector.

The prisoner turned purple with rage at the Inspector's bantering. "I'll stop all this," he threatened. "Pulling a law-abiding citizen in every time he happens to be on the streets. I'll get you fired for this, Whitfield. This is the fourth time it's happened in as many months. I'll see the Home Secretary himself—you mark my words."

"Quit likely you will, Wally. Quite likely," replied Whitfield calmly. "He's visiting Wormwood Scrubs over the week-end. I can make arrangements for you to be housed there, maybe," he added thoughtfully. "One prison's as good as another these days, I'm told."

Hayley was more livid than ever. He wrestled with the bracelets in a futile effort to get free. If looks alone could kill, Whitfield was as good as dead.

Then, seeing he was trapped, he abandoned the struggle. Flinging himself into a near-by chair (the detective had slipped the other handcuff on to him long since), he lay huddled, almost exhausted by the intensity of his own emotions. "Now do your worst, Whitfield," he challenged defiantly.

"Look him over, one of you," was the Inspector's answer.

He offered no further resistance, and his pockets were gone through in a trice.

This time, though, he was caught with the stuff.

His pockets contained more dope than the detectives had found in the settee.

The only other interesting discovery was, strangely enough, a letter; but it was not a love-letter.

Hunt picked it up.

It appeared to be in code, for the typewritten address on the envelope was unreadable:

Tr Fyx Pitx,
XV. Gyenm Pinhj,
Oljdhek.

was the inscription it bore.

The single sheet inside was also typewritten and equally mysterious. It was impossible to understand a word of what was written, for the message though short, ran as follows:

"F rq jq xxoi runu. Zfr tx ec xw jxhh. Z
vvz wrg jzxqz. Vo iru pxt iij xzt? Nmu jwbx
hwi fxu qqi itu qci. Qqo ygxz tqx pjq bip jpz
c goz txk xtz. Tnjz fzqz voir j ujxk znzgu.
Twxp xgu exhmz ggwi. Htxt muh hp x qq?"

As soon as he realised that he was merely wasting time in attempting to solve the code himself, he decided to send it to the expert at the Yard. As there seemed quite a variety of letters, he had no doubts but that Sergeant Headly would find it quite a simple matter to decipher the message.

Putting the letter in his pocket, he crossed over to Whitfield. "What's the programme now, Dick?" he asked.

Whitfield was looking thoughtfully at a key he had picked up from amongst the contents of Hayley's pockets. "Wally hangs out in the next road, I believe. What about a look over his premises?"

"Yes, by all means. I'd no idea he lived so close."

Five minutes later found them in No. 29 Westby Gardens.

The house was very similar in build to the one they had just left, but it was furnished in a more lavish style. Evidently Wally studied his personal comfort to a remarkable degree.

The search here for dope took longer. But it was well worth the extra trouble, for secreted in out-of-the-way corners of the villa were small packets of cocaine, heroin, and other prohibited drugs.

The total value of the dope discovered Whitfield estimated at well over £5,000.

Thinking that on his arrival back at the Yard he would find Sergeant Headly had taken his departure, he crossed the dining-room to a little table on which there stood a typewriter. An accompanying note would ensure the speedy decoding on the morrow, he thought.

Inserting a sheet of paper, he began: "Inspector Hunt's compliments. He would be—" And there he stopped, for, chancing to look up, the following caught his eye: Ztqcxwjip Brtj'q wifcgzfxjtjq. Bx mirgh yx."

In a flash the solution came to him. The arms bearing the type had been removed and others substituted. The result of this change-over was that the letters pressed on the keyboard did not print the

corresponding letters on the paper. For instance, he saw at once that I on the keyboard, when pressed, printed Z. Likewise, H printed B.

A moment more and he had grasped the full significance of this. With the aid of the machine it should be possible to decode the mysterious message himself. The thought was father to the deed. In a very short time he had pressed the keys in the order given in the coded letter.

Hardly waiting to finish, he withdrew the sheet. To his disappointment, instead of a sensible sentence, the first line was another unreadable jumble:

"M us ts eeyo uaga. Inu ne xp ec tedd. I ffi cul tiesi," he read.

"The wrong typewriter," he said aloud, "but the right system."

Just as he was putting it aside, the letters "I ffi" caught his eye. Something seemed familiar, though unusual, about them.

A moment more and their meaning stood revealed. This *was* the message, but the words were purposely run one into the other to mislead.

With this knowledge, the rest was easy:

"Must see you again. Unexpected difficulties. If you are not being watched, come as soon as possible. Insert short reply in *Evening Times*. If you state vigilance relaxed, will code new address,"

he read.

"Look at this, Dick," he called.

Whitfield obeyed, looking over his shoulder.

"Great Scot!" he ejaculated. "There's life in the old gang yet."

"There is indeed," replied Hunt; "a man who loses a quarter of a million in one night isn't going to give up his business, even although it's a dying business, without a struggle."

XX

THE RED HOUSE

SHORTLY before ten o'clock Hunt arrived at the rendezvous close to the Yard, where the Chief Constable and Walker awaited him.

He was obviously excited, and carried, the others noticed, a small case, which they thought contained a gramophone.

"Going to give us an entertainment, Inspector?" asked Walker.

"Yes," replied Hunt, putting down the case. "Hardly the kind of entertainment you're expecting, Superintendent, though—but an entertainment all the same."

In as few words as possible he told them of the events of the evening, the raid on the house in the avenue, the arrest of the traffickers, the detaining of the man Hayley, and the subsequent discovery of the coded letter.

Then he sprung his surprise. He had, he said, discovered the decoding machine at Hayley's house and had brought it along with him.

Here he paused, and produced the decoded message. "Take a look at this, sir," he said to the Chief Constable, "and tell me who you think the sender is."

It was Walker who was the first to answer. He had risen, and stood looking over the Chief Constable's shoulder.

"Evans," he said excitedly. "Evans, without a doubt."

"Yes," agreed Major Williams. "It certainly looks as though it might be our man. Whoever it is, we ought to be able to trap him fairly easily now we know the code."

"Yes," replied Hunt. "We ought. That's why I brought the typewriter here. I want you two to help me to compose an advertisement for insertion in the *Evening Times*."

He started to unpack the machine. "How do you think this will do?" he asked. "'Police vigilance relaxed. Will endeavour to keep any appointment.' Better make it as brief as possible, don't you think?"

"Yes. That'll do fine," agreed the Chief Constable.

Inserting a piece of paper in the machine, Hunt set to work. He tapped out the mystic letters—

"Ci gzw xkzn zgut wxpx. G oexhmz ggx thxuk
ir pj. I dx xcu toucc iztj fx tj"—

all jumbled together, as seemed to be the gangs' practise.

"I'll take this down to the *Evening Times* myself," he remarked, "and make sure it gets put in. The person this is meant for will never know that his plans have miscarried and his message has been intercepted, as I have given orders that Hayley's arrest is to be kept a close secret—at any rate until we've got our reply."

"I suppose we've nothing more to do until then?" commented Walker.

"I hardly agree with you there, Superintendent," answered Hunt. "I don't intend to rely too much on my assumption that any reply we get will come from Evans. At any rate, I intend to keep up the search. By the way, how did you two get on at Kingston this afternoon?"

It transpired that they had had no luck at all. No one appeared to remember anyone answering the description of either Evans or his wife.

"Well, as there doesn't seem anything else we can do to-night, I'm off to bed to get as much sleep as possible—there's no telling if we shall get the chance for any to-morrow night."

So saying, the Inspector took his departure, after wishing them both a very good night.

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The next morning found Hunt early at the *Evening Times* office. By presenting his official card, he speedily obtained an interview with the advertisement manager. Less than ten minutes later he left the building, assured that the advertisement would be inserted in the first edition.

The remainder of that day was spent in a fruitless search of the hotels, and he was not sorry when bed-time came round once more. He could look forward with hopefulness to the morrow, for he felt confident that the *Evening Times* would contain the hoped-for answer to his advertisement.

Another good night's rest, and he awoke in the best of spirits.

He had left instructions that the *Evening Times* were to 'phone him immediately the expected mes-

sage was sent in. But when ten o'clock, the time after which no further advertisements could be guaranteed insertion in the same day's issue, had come and gone without the hoped-for result, his mood changed for one of angry desperation.

But it did not alter the facts; his trap had seemingly failed.

All through that day—the longest day that he had ever endured, it seem to Hunt—he fumed and fretted, though working like a Trojan on his inquiries at the hotels the while.

Then to bed, and a restless, disturbed night, as he turned the case over again and again, in his mind. Once more, for what must have been the hundredth time, he lived through his discoveries. He visualised again that scene in which he had seen the body of the murdered air-ace taken from the burned-out wreckage of his "Moth." Then followed visions of the search for clues by the body of the shot police constable in Redstock Lane; the resultant inquests; the inquiries he had made in the company of the Chief Constable and Superintendent, first at Moorlands, and later, at Forest Court; the unexpected discovery that the Bentley's front tire had been cut in a manner similar to that of the tire of the car that had stopped by the body in Redstock Lane; the hue and cry for, and subsequent breath-taking chase and arrest of, the mechanic, Bailey; the midnight appearance of the new baronet, Sir Henry Sandleston, at Forest Court, and the still-unsolved mystery of his astounding and almost immediate disappearance from his bedroom; the astonishing plea for all editions of the local papers that the suspected me-

DOBRIN LIBRARIES

RETURN WITHIN TWO WEEKS

chanic had made from the dock, to be followed later by his statement that the dead prison-breaker, Newton, was his ne'er-do-well brother.

Next he recalled to mind the Chief Constable's acceptable theory that the single set of prints in Angels' meadow, that had provided food for so much serious thought, had been made by Evans carrying his wife; the arrival at the police station of Captain Matthews, the skipper of the Poole fishing smack, with his news of the sinking of Evans' *empty* 'plane; the story of the Evanses being seen at their riverside bungalow by the salmon-poacher, Birch; the revelation that Sir Charles Stafford had been the "Boss" of the Tottenham Court Road gang of dope traffickers; the arrest of the remaining members of that infamous company that followed as a result of Claude Gascoigne's visit to the Yard; and finally, his own share in the discovery and decoding of the letter found in the breast-pocket of the notorious drug-trafficker, Hayley.

At last came morning, and with it the first of a chain of events that were to lead to a finale Hunt was destined to carry in his memory to the grave.

At eight o'clock he received a 'phone call from the *Evening Times*. A coded advertisement had been handed in. It had obviously been delivered by hand, as the envelope was unstamped.

The clerk read out the letters: "J itz nbju jxg. Xkx tpxhb ir qxb utg xoqjug y utq."

Hunt immediately ran them out on the machine. The result was most satisfactory: "To-night at eleven. Red House, Hanley, St. Albans," was what was written on the sheet.

The thoroughly happy Inspector lost no time in getting over to the hotel where the Chief Constable and Walker were staying, and letting them know of this latest development.

Walker seemed anxious to get the matter over, and was keen on going to St. Albans straight away; the Chief Constable, however, agreed with Hunt that it would be better to wait till evening, keep the appointment, and take them unawares.

This course was eventually decided upon, so Hunt suggested a visit to the Yard to have a look at an ordnance survey map of the St. Albans district.

Not long afterwards the trio were in Hunt's little office at the Yard.

The Red House was clearly shown—an isolated residence a good half-mile from the village of Hanley.

"What's the order of attack, Inspector?" asked the Chief Constable. "Do we tackle the job ourselves, or call in the help of a squad of your men?"

Hunt thought for a moment. "If you're game, sir, I propose we tackle the job alone."

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Just after eight o'clock they set off in the Chief Constable's car to St. Albans, where they intended to wait until nightfall before continuing out to reconnoitre in the vicinity of the Red House.

The journey down took less than an hour, and they adjourned to a hotel until closing time.

At 10.30 they reached the village, where they looked up the police constable.

He was able to tell them that a lady and gentle-

man, whom he had not seen before, were staying at the house.

The house belonged to a gentleman from Town, who only came down at week-ends. He was not there now, but he had left his car for his guests to use.

The only other occupant of the house was the elderly housekeeper, a stupid, slovenly old woman.

The constable could not understand why Mr. Watkins put up with such an unsatisfactory menial, as he seemed such a smart gentleman himself.

After a short discussion it was decided that, as Evans would most probably open the door in person, the best plan would be for the three to spring upon him without giving him a second's warning.

At two minutes to eleven their car stood on the brow of a slight dip, facing the Red House, which was some three hundred yards distant.

"Are we ready?" inquired the Chief Constable.

"O.K.," replied Hunt and Walker of one accord.

The lights of the car had long since been extinguished. The Chief Constable released the brake, and the car slowly began the long, silent glide down to the house.

Two minutes later they drew up noiselessly outside their destination.

They stepped out and began the short walk up the dark, shrubbery-bordered drive to the front door. The front of the house, they noticed, was in darkness.

Going into the porch, Hunt saw that there was no bell—only a heavy brass knocker.

This he raised, and the sound of its falling reverberated throughout the whole house.

Almost immediately shuffling footsteps could be heard coming along the passage to the door. Evidently visitors were expected.

But, to the officials' disappointment, it was neither Evans nor his wife who opened it. It was the half-witted housekeeper.

"You the gentleman what's come to see Mr. Watkins' friend?" she began; then, seeing the others, she realised that something was wrong, and made a desperate effort to shut the door in their faces.

But she was too late. Hunt was already half inside the hall, the Chief Constable at his heels, whilst Walker was left to deal with the indignant housekeeper, who suddenly became vicious as well as annoyed.

Walker, however, realising that this was no time to stand on ceremony, clapped a massive hand over her none too comely mouth.

These evolutions took place so quickly and noiselessly that any occupants of the house could have had no warning to be on their guard.

Seeing that Walker was more than capable of managing the struggling female, Hunt and the Chief Constable passed rapidly down the hall to a door, from under which a faint glimmer of light was visible.

The Inspector threw open this door, entering the room unconcernedly—but in his hand was a small black automatic, and his finger was in readiness on the trigger.

The room had only one occupant, an elderly-looking lady, her grey hair fast turning white. On her nose reposed a pair of tinted horn-rimmed spectacles,

and her dress, Hunt noticed, was many years behind the fashion.

She had risen to her feet as he opened the door, but her smile of welcome turned to an expression of utter dismay when she saw who her unannounced visitors were.

Hunt started to pocket the weapon as soon as he saw that Evans was not in the room, advancing towards the terror-stricken woman the while.

"Mrs. Evans, I believe," he said sternly. "I hold a warrant for your arrest on a charge of being concerned in the murder of Sir Charles Stafford at Redstock on the—"

But he got no further.

With a crash, the unconscious form of the Chief Constable hit the floor alongside him, sending the revolver flying from his hand.

That he saw, but no more, for at that instant the light went out, and, before his eyes could accustom themselves to the inky darkness, something struck him violently in the back, sending him headlong under the table.

XXI

WHICH OUGHT TO HAVE BEEN CONCLUSION

AFTER what seemed an age, the half-winded Inspector managed to get his bearings, and started to crawl slowly towards the door.

But, before he had covered half the distance, someone stumbled over him. Throwing out his arms, more by instinct than with expectations of making a capture, they came in contact with the body of the woman he took to be Mrs. Evans. She struggled violently, and managed to break free for an instant.

The Inspector made another blind grab and, more by luck than judgment, caught her again, this time by the hair.

A blood-curdling shriek rent the uncanny silence of the house as, realising that she was trapped, she let out a piercing scream.

Then, in spite of the intense pain it must have cost her, she redoubled her efforts to escape.

Hunt started to rise to his feet, seeking to get a firm grip of her body with his free hand.

Just then, though, her efforts proved successful, for the wig she was wearing came off in the Inspector's hand, and a moment later, before Hunt had a chance to stop her, she fled through the door to safety.

"Look out!" he bawled to the Superintendent,

who, he supposed, was still somewhere in the gloom of the hall. "Stop her, for the love of Mike."

But no answer came, and he heard her pass out unchallenged on to the gravel drive.

He realised at once that the Evanses had been too clever for him, and had somehow got wind of their arrival. He guessed that Evans himself had been watching from the shelter of one of the upstairs windows, timing his attack with commendable exactness.

And he saw, too, that he was in a desperate position himself, for Evans apparently had not yet left the house. He could hardly suppress a shudder at the thought that he might at that moment be covered by the murderer's revolver, and shot in cold blood before help could reach him.

Feeling in his pocket for his flashlamp, he withdrew it, meaning to search for his revolver. Finding it at last, he switched it on—but no beam of light answered the action. It was obvious that the bulb had been broken in his fall.

With a muffled curse he slipped it back into his pocket, and started to grope for his gun on the floor. But it was of no avail; he was unable to discover its whereabouts.

Abandoning his search, and cursing his folly in suggesting coming to the house without a proper escort, he crept slowly over to where the injured Chief Constable lay.

He was completely knocked out, Hunt found, but was breathing strongly. It would only be a matter of minutes before he regained consciousness.

He decided to risk striking a match to make a quick examination of his injuries.

He saw by its feeble light that the room was empty. He was in no immediate danger, it seemed.

Then with a hurried glance he took in the Chief Constable's injuries. He had evidently been dealt a savage blow with a stick, or more probably, the butt end of a revolver, for there were no signs of blood—only a fast-swelling bruise.

As the last flicker of the match died out, Hunt heard the front door slam, and at the same time the sound of a car engine being started up in the road. And he recognised the car by its exhaust note; it was the Chief Constable's, beyond doubt.

Instantly, regardless of the danger, he jumped to his feet, and, without further thought for his gun, ran out through the hall to the door.

In front of him, some little distance down the drive, he heard, rather than saw, a running figure.

Without the loss of a moment, he realised that if he was to catch his man he would have to resort to strategy.

The fugitive was too far ahead for him to overtake him before he reached the car; his only hope was to reach a point a few yards down the road before the car passed, and attempt to leap on to the running-board.

Turning aside from the drive, he forced his way through the shrubbery, raced across a small lawn and, after scrambling over a low hedge, landed in a meadow on the other side.

A sprint of a hundred yards brought him, as he had hoped, to a point in the road where he would still have time to attempt to intercept the car.

As he dragged himself clear of some barbed wire

by the simple, but expensive, method of leaving part of his clothing behind him, Major Williams' bus roared by, its engine shrieking its heart out in the lower gears.

Luckily, in the excitement of the moment, Mrs. Evans had forgotten to switch the lights on, so both she and her husband failed to notice the Inspector crouched by the hedge.

By the time that she had rectified this omission, Hunt had managed to gauge his spring, and had landed safely, though uncomfortably, on the luggage carrier at the rear.

He clung to his precarious perch until the car was running smoothly in top gear, then started to climb as carefully and silently as possible towards the back seat.

After one breathless moment, when Evans looked round, apparently to see if they were being pursued, his task was easy.

Once safely over the back of the car he dropped to the floor where, shielded from view by the back of the front seat, he had time to wonder what his next move was to be. So far he had not given the matter much thought, and he now began to doubt his wisdom in embarking on this uninvited ride.

He decided that if he did not act until the car came to a standstill he would run less risk, as Mrs. Evans, if startled while driving, would be quite likely to lose her head and turn the car over.

The next question was, what weapon did he intend to use? For all he knew, Mrs. Evans might be in possession of a gun and, whilst he was taking Evans, she might easily hold him up.

All things considered, it would be best for him to see if he could find a tire-lever, or something equally heavy, with which to lay out his man temporarily before re-arresting Mrs. Evans.

Thinking there might be a suitable weapon in the tool-kit under the rear seat, he began to turn the cushion up. Inch by inch it gently rose, until, at last, he was able to see that there was indeed a tire-lever there.

Slowly he extended his arm to reach it. But at that moment Evans turned again—and this time he discovered his unwelcome passenger.

With an oath he left his seat beside the driver, flinging himself heavily on top of the unsuspecting Inspector.

His weight knocked Hunt flat on the floor and, before the startled police officer could rise to defend himself, the murderer's strong, sinuous hands were about his throat.

The car was going much faster now than previously; Mrs. Evans' nerves were finding the sudden shocks too much for them.

Had she not accelerated from a steady thirty-five to somewhere in the neighbourhood of fifty-five, the story might have had an entirely different ending, as Hunt was decidedly getting much the worst of the argument when the car took a small, hump-backed bridge in its stride.

This threw the back of the car, and the struggling combatants, high into the air, and when they hit the bottom again Hunt's throat was free and he was on top.

But his opponent was not done yet. He fought

with redoubled fury, seemingly possessed of maniacal strength.

Inch by inch he forced Hunt back, till at length they were fighting on the seat itself.

Still the car shot on madly through the night, Mrs. Evans glancing back from time to time, noting with satisfaction that her man was slowly, but surely winning. And there was none to see the fight to the death that was taking place at her rear, for the road they traversed led through open country towards Harpenden, and was entirely deserted.

The Inspector fought valiantly, but in vain—he had been hurt more than he realised by his fall at the house. Little by little the relentless arms of his adversary pushed him back—till soon he was in imminent danger of being forced over the folded hood at the rear of the car and into the roadway to almost certain death.

Another minute and the tired Inspector would have been clay in the other's hands; his strength was all but exhausted. Evans could have killed him almost without resistance.

But in that minute came salvation. Suddenly the even running of the car changed.

Whilst rounding a bend in the road, Mrs. Evans had seen the red lights and closed gates of a railway level crossing—and she had realised that it was going to be as much as she could do to pull up, for the speedometer registered a speed of a mile a minute.

With a squeal of its brakes the car shot sideways in a terrific skid, ramming and almost mounting the bank at the side of the road.

But it did not overturn, though the shock of the

impact burst two tires, and sent Evans and the Inspector hurtling into the road.

The last thing Hunt remembered before losing consciousness was seeing the car, with Mrs. Evans helpless at the wheel, crash through the gates before coming to a standstill, right in the track of the approaching London-bound express.

But he did not hear, as did the crossing-keeper, the blood-curdling shriek of the express's whistle, nor the agonised death-screams of Mrs. Evans, as the engine caught the car, carrying it some distance up the line before flinging it aside, a mass of twisted metal.

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Hunt recovered consciousness about an hour after the accident. Everything was hazy at first, and in his dazed state he could not understand why he was in hospital, with an anxious-looking Chief Constable standing by his bedside.

His head was aching too; almost unbearably. This puzzled him for a time, as he had no recollection of being wounded. Then suddenly it all came back.

"Where's Evans?" was the first question he asked. "Did you get him?"

The Chief Constable shook his head. "No," he said sadly. "We didn't get him.—I'm afraid we've made a sorry mess of the whole affair. Evans must have seen us coming up the drive."

"You all right?" Hunt inquired.

"Yes," replied the Chief Constable. "I only got a slight tap on the head. Evans must have slipped

out of the back door when he saw us coming, attacking Walker first as he was silencing the house-keeper. He's only got a slight tap, though. He'll soon be all right again. Next he coshed me—that's the last thing I remember.

"Later, when I'd recovered sufficiently to get my bearings, I discovered that they had taken my car. I went back to the house, and found Walker was well enough to set out with me in search of you. We guessed you'd managed somehow to get mixed up in the disappearance of the car.

"Well, we hadn't gone far down the road—we saw by the car-tracks that was the way you had gone—when we saw the lights of a fast overtaking car.

"We stood in the middle of the road, waving our hats, forcing the car to a standstill, despite its prolonged horn-blowing.

"We soon discovered, to our surprise, that it was an ambulance on its way to a level-crossing a little farther on, where a car had crashed through the gates, killing the lady driver and badly injuring her companion.

"When we told the doctor who had given us this information who we were, he immediately offered to drive us to the scene of the disaster.

"We accepted, of course, and that is how we came to find you unconscious in the signalman's cabin.

"The doctor was soon able to assure us that you were only stunned and shaken, so we left you there to go with him to inspect the wreckage of my car and the body of Mrs. Evans.

"The express had luckily not been derailed by the severe impact, but my Sunbeam was reduced to scrap

iron. As the train had been travelling at a good seventy miles an hour, and had caught the car broad-side on, this was not surprising.

"Mrs. Evans' body had been taken from the debris before we arrived. Death had been practically instantaneous." He did not attempt to describe the terrible injuries he had seen on her mangled body. Hunt had sufficient imagination to visualise them.

"Walker and I are both agreed that it was the body of Mrs. Evans beyond doubt. But there was no sign of Evans. How he managed to escape is a mystery to me."

Hunt was able to supply the missing reason. "When we fell, I bore the brunt of the impact," he explained. "My body must have saved him; probably he was not even stunned."

"We had a thorough look round for him, anyway," continued the Chief Constable, "but, as I said, we were unable to find any traces of him."

"Well, if it's any consolation to us, we know for certain now that we're on the right track. That's about the only good that has come of the night's work."

A doctor came up just then; the nurse had told him that his patient had regained consciousness.

"Feeling better, old man?" he queried.

Hunt assured him that he was feeling O.K., which was very far from the truth. "I suppose I can get up now?" he asked.

"What do you propose doing if you get up?" the doctor replied.

Hunt considered for a moment. "I must get back to the Yard," he said. "I shall get in enough trouble

as it is. Every hour's start that Evans gets will make our task the harder."

The doctor considered for a moment. "Righto, Inspector," he said at length. "Have it your own way—but if *I have* given in, you must promise me you'll take things easy for a day or two."

XXII

HUNT SEES DAYLIGHT

A WEEK later Evans was still at large; the police had no clue as to his whereabouts, and the Press had almost forgotten the murder of Sir Charles.

Hunt was in the office of the Chief Commissioner, a considerably rattled man.

He was reminding Sir James Spreadbury for the twentieth time that he had only himself to blame that the case had not been cleared up long ago.

But Sir James was not blaming the Inspector for the unsatisfactory ending of it; he quite understood that it was only human nature that had made the trio feel they ought to be allowed to effect the arrests without the calling in of the Flying Squad.

"You're taking it to heart too much, my boy," he said, in a kindly manner. He could be very understanding and human at times. "You surely haven't given up hope so soon, have you?"

Hunt smiled grimly. "No. I'm going to bring this case to a satisfactory conclusion, even if it takes me all my life."

"That's the spirit, Inspector. Let's pray that it doesn't take all that long, though," the Chief replied. "Now, what was that other little matter you wanted me to look into?"

"Oh, yes, I'd almost forgotten. Are those two men still trailing Gascoigne?"

"Why, yes," the Chief replied, "but nothing fresh has come to light. I think you're putting a wrong construction on McKenzie's words. I'm pretty certain he meant 'his friends again' to apply to Gascoigne getting friendly with him just before his arrest. Possibly it flashed across his mind at that moment who his betrayer was. I don't think you will find Gascoigne is a member of the gang—what sense would there be in his giving his own men away?"

"I must admit, sir," answered Hunt, "that that is one of the many things that are still puzzling me. The case is full of loose ends; in fact, although we know our man without a doubt, we are a long way off discovering the motive for Sir Charles' murder.

"It couldn't have been due to the fact that Sir Charles was ruining him; even if Sir Charles *had* effectively stopped his income, we know it could not have seriously inconvenienced him. The discovery of the quarter of a million proves that.

"It could not have been love. Evans was married, apparently happily. Besides, the participation of Mrs. Evans proves that—she would hardly have been likely to help her husband kill her lover. And we know that she did help—her behaviour on the night she met her death was that of a guilty woman.

"Then, too, there's the mystery of the appearance and disappearance of Sir Henry Sandleson. Where do we fit that in the puzzle?"

"I admit it's a teaser still," replied Sir James, "but I think the solution, when it comes, will prove to be quite a simple one."

By the Chief's manner Hunt could tell that the

interview was at an end. He rose to go. "You'll let me know if Gascoigne gets up to any funny tricks? I can't help thinking that letter *was* meant for him."

"Certainly," the Chief answered, "I'll let you know immediately."

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Hunt arrived back at Bournemouth just after midday; his journey down was his record one. He had not been to "The City of the Pines" since the day of his hurried departure for Winchester, having spent his time in a thorough, though ineffectual search of London. The Chief Constable and Walker, however, had returned the day following their ill-fated visit to the Red House.

The Chief Constable was away in another part of the county, but the Superintendent was at the station.

He welcomed Hunt warmly, and when they were seated he began, at the Inspector's inviting, to tell of the little they had discovered at the Bournemouth end of the trail.

It was chiefly of the Evanses; of the many inquiries he had made of their friends, with a view to throwing more light on the motive of the murder.

But nothing fresh had come to light. Sir Charles and Mrs. Evans were looked upon as the best of friends; it seemed inconceivable to their acquaintances that she should have helped to bring about his death.

As to the accomplice who had taken Mrs. Thornton's car to Totland Corner—of him, or her, there was no trace!

Neither had the new baronet reappeared. The motive and identity of the accomplice, to say nothing of the mysterious movements of Sir Henry, were as far off solution as ever.

The only other item of news that interested Hunt to any degree concerned Jim Hucklesby and Bailey.

They had, Walker said, left that morning for Liverpool, *en route* to catch the night boat to the Isle of Man, where Jim hoped to succeed in his attempt to win the race for the Tourist Trophy. Bailey was going over to act as mechanic, the Chief Constable offering no objection.

Hunt had not by any means forgotten the exciting ride he had had on the Star Special that Jim hoped to ride to victory. "I wish him luck," he said. Then—"When does practising start?"

"To-morrow," the Superintendent replied. "He left his departure as late as possible in case we needed his help. A nice lad, Jim," he added reflectively. "He ought to have started a week ago; most of the riders have had some days on the island; but he put what he considered was his duty first, and stayed, as I said, to see if he could help me in any way."

"Yes," agreed Hunt, "a really nice lad, as you say. Now, what about a spot of lunch?"

The Superintendent thought this a good idea, proposing that Hunt should accompany him to his house, where he felt confident his wife would be glad to welcome him.

Just as they were preparing to leave, the 'phone bell rang.

Walker took off the receiver. "For you, Inspector," he said.

Hunt took the instrument from him. The call was from the Yard.

Gascoigne had, he learnt, been folowed to Euston Station, where he had taken a ticket, and entrained, to Liverpool.

He put down the instrument, feeling considerably puzzled. What did this mean, he asked himself? But he was unable to supply the answer to his own question. Liverpool suggested ships, and ships a means of fleeing the country. The Yard had "nothing on him," though; as a matter of fact, they were under an obligation to him, and he was perfectly free to leave the country if he chose to do so. Still, Hunt had the feeling that there was something "fishy" about this latest move of his.

Once more they were about to leave, and once more they were delayed.

This time a constable knocked at the door, and when he announced, "Sir Henry Sandleson to see you, sir," the two surprised officials almost collapsed.

"Now for the *dénouement*," whispered Walker, after telling the man to show him in.

A moment later Sir Henry entered, a tall, well-built man, his rather handsome face disfigured somewhat by a scar, received in the war.

Walker received him coldly. "Take a chair," he ordered, rather than asked.

By his manner Hunt could see the Superintendent intended him to conduct the interview.

Turning, to face the baronet more squarely, he began, "I am Detective-Inspector Hunt from the Yard. I am in charge of the investigations into the

murder of Sir Charles Stafford . . . your cousin, I believe?"

"Yes," the visitor assented. "That's right—he was my cousin. It's about that I've called, of course."

"I imagined so," answered Hunt rather sternly. He was no respecter of the aristocracy when they interfered with his duties to the extent Sir Henry had done. "I suppose you realise," he continued, "that we have been hunting high and low for you since the night you vanished so completely from Forest Court?"

Sir Henry looked mystified. "I don't quite follow you," he said.

Hunt began to get a trifle annoyed. "I thought I had made my meaning quite clear. I said, quite distinctly, I believe, that we had been searching high and low for you since the night of May 23rd, when you chose to vanish so mysteriously from the house of your late cousin, Sir Charles Stafford!"

Sir Henry smiled. "I'm sorry, Inspector," he explained, "but you're barking up the wrong tree! I haven't been near Forest Court for months! Someone has been pulling your leg if they stuffed you up with that yarn."

It was Hunt's turn to look mystified. "I'm sorry," he said simply; "there's been a mistake somewhere." Then—"Perhaps you'll be good enough to tell us why you haven't called to see us before?"

His answer came immediately. "I couldn't, old man. I've been out of the country."

"Out of the country?" echoed Hunt. "That complicates matters more than ever."

"Yes, I've been out to —— [He mentioned some out-of-the-way European State.] There's been a Royal christening there, as you probably know."

Hunt did know. The first pictures of the ceremony had arrived in England only a day or two previously.

Sir Henry continued. "I work for the —— Sound Film Co. We went out to film the show." He spoke expressive slang, Hunt noticed.

"I heard of the murder whilst we were out there. Of course, I knew the title came to me; that didn't interest me a lot. What's the use of a title without money to go with it? American heiresses are scarce now!"

"I suppose so," answered Hunt. "But doesn't the estate come to you?"

"Oh, no!" corrected the baronet. "It was bought by Sir Charles with his own money. Not a penny comes to me. He was free to will it where he wished."

Hunt had not considered the money question before. He had taken it for granted that Sir Henry succeeded to the estate as well as the title. But, so far as he could see, this new development made little difference to the case.

"When did you leave England?" he asked.

"Let's see . . . May the . . ."—he thought hard—"the 23rd, I believe. Yes. That's right . . . May the 23rd."

"The day of the murder," Hunt observed. "From Dover, I suppose?"

"No. Southampton—on the *Regal*. It was so much easier to carry our traps that way. No changing from train to train. Once on board the boat

and everything left undisturbed until we docked at—"

Hunt considered. "What time did the boat sail?" he asked.

"Twelve midday," was the answer.

Hunt thought for a moment. There was ample time for anyone to participate in the murder and still have any amount of time in which to catch the boat. He did not feel disposed to dismiss Sir Henry so easily from the case. Evans must have had an accomplice other than his wife; the police had no idea who that accomplice was. Therefore, anyone who had any connection with any of the parties concerned must be regarded with the gravest suspicion.

"Did you know Evans?" he asked.

"Oh, yes! Quite well," Sir Henry replied. "A very nice fellow too, I always thought."

"Yes—that seems the general opinion. But I usually find the murderer is given a better name than the victim. Now, one more question. A very personal one, I'm afraid—but it can't be helped.

"What sort of terms were you on with Sir Charles?"

The baronet considered for a moment. "Why do you ask me that, I wonder?" he said aloud. Then—

"You surely don't think I'm mixed up in the affair, do you?" he asked suspiciously.

"Hardly that," answered Hunt, "but, as you know, the Evanses had an accomplice. We haven't traced him yet, and until we do we've got to ask unpleasant questions."

"Well, as I've a perfectly clear conscience, I'll answer your question," said the baronet graciously,

"although I'm not at all sure you're not exceeding your powers in asking it. Sir Charles hated the sight of me, and the feeling was reciprocated."

"So I understand," Hunt replied. "Now your answer leads to another question. When did you last see Sir Charles?"

"In London, two months ago—in the lounge of the Savoy, to be exact!"

"Did you speak?"

"No. We merely nodded to one another."

A further quarter of an hour's chat failed to help the police in their inquiries. Seeing that he could not enlighten the officials, Sir Henry rose to go.

"Let's have your address, Sir Henry, in case we want to look you up at any time," asked Hunt.

The baronet acquiesced, handing over a card. "You won't find me at home for a week or two," he remarked. "We're going over to the island to take some shots of the T.T. races."

Hunt mentioned that Jim was riding.

"Oh, yes. So I've been told. Is he any good?" the baronet inquired.

"Quite good," replied Hunt enthusiastically, "and, if the will to win counts for anything, he'll be well placed at the finish."

"Sir Charles paid his entry fee, I believe," Sir Henry remarked. "A great sport, Charles; I grant him that. He was always fond of risky pastimes. He rode himself, you know, a couple of times just after the war. Didn't do any good, though—the machine let him down on both occasions."

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Walker was quite correct. His good lady was glad to see the Inspector, and served up a delightful lunch.

Over the meal the two discussed the next step to be taken. Hunt explained that he had interviewed Day, but the man had stuck to his original story, not deviating from it in the slightest.

Neither of them knew quite what to make of Sir Henry's denial of a visit to Forest Court, nor, in fact, could they quite fathom Sir Henry himself.

The obvious thing to do, they eventually agreed, was to make another journey out to Lymington, and try to make Sturman change his story.

They started the short walk to the police station. Walker had one or two small matters to attend to before they could depart.

Not far from the house he discovered that he had nearly run out of tobacco.

"Shan't be a moment," he said, entering a near-by shop.

Hunt stood on the pavement, gazing across the road towards the window of a ladies' hairdressing establishment.

All of a sudden he started—startled at what he saw there. It was a perfectly normal hairdresser's window so far as one could see—the same kind of wares displayed there as in practically every hairdresser's in the country—and displayed in just the same attractive manner.

And in that moment he solved "THE 'MOTH' MURDER MYSTERY"—the most baffling crime of the century. Solved it in its entirety—saw how he had

been blinded and led "right up the garden" to the last.

Walker came out of the tobacconist's at that moment.

Hunt stood on the pavement, oblivious to the passing traffic, not noticing the waiting Superintendent—a man lost to the world.

"You look as though you've seen a ghost, Inspector," Walker began.

Hunt came back to earth with a start. "I have," he said, "or, perhaps I should say, something mighty like one."

The Superintendent was gazing in the same direction as Hunt. "I don't see anything to stare at," he confessed, although he too, at that moment, was studying the shop window.

"If you're ready," he suggested, seeing Hunt still wore a dazed expression.

"Yes, I'm ready," replied Hunt, "but I'm afraid Lymington's off—for me, at any rate." He was thinking rapidly; a staggering possibility had just flashed through his mind—a million to one chance that he decided to gamble on.

Just as the huntsman knows instinctively the best covert to draw for a fox; the keeper the best stands at which to place his wealthiest guns; so Hunt, the avenger of a terrible double crime, in a moment of inspiration, guessed where he would be the most likely to find his man.

"Lymington off?" repeated the Superintendent.

"Then where are you going, Inspector?" he asked.

Hunt did not answer immediately; he was hurriedly turning times and distances over in his mind.

"I think I can just about make it," he murmured half aloud. Then, in reply to the Superintendent's query, "I'm going to the Isle of Man. If I hurry to Croydon and charter a 'plane, I think I shall just manage to catch the night boat."

"Croydon—the Isle of Man," echoed the Superintendent stupidly. Then—"What the devil is he up to?" as he saw the excited Inspector hurry off down the road as though he had but a moment to live.

Before following him, however, Walker crossed the road and spent several minutes gazing fixedly at the window of "Farmer & Gainsborough, Ladies' Hair-dressers"; then, still as puzzled, he followed slowly in Hunt's wake.

XXIII

IN THE ISLAND

So certain was Hunt that his deductions were correct that before leaving the town he paid a hurried visit to Dr. Burroughs to obtain the latter's signature to yet another warrant.

The doctor seemed surprised to see him, but invited him into his study, where he poured him out a stiff drink.

The Yard man began by binding his host to secrecy, after which he expounded his newest theory.

At first the doctor was openly sceptical. Hunt suspected that he was wondering whether the accident at the crossing had left his brain a trifle distorted.

But as the Inspector continued, fitting each fact neatly and quickly into its appointed place, the worthy J. P. became more and more impressed.

"By Jove, Inspector, I believe you're right," he said with unconcealed admiration as Hunt concluded. "I'll sign the warrant immediately—I can see you're itching to be gone."

"Thanks," replied the Yard man, "I guessed you would. When one comes to think of it, it's the only theory that can possibly be made to fit the facts. In all our others we left various features of the case unexplained."

On his return he looked in on Walker at the station.

"Are you going to keep your discovery all to yourself?" the Superintendent asked.

"Yes," replied Hunt, "I'm afraid I must. If I were to tell you just what I thought, I know you'd laugh at me. . . . However, to be as fair as possible, I shall write to you to-night, enclosing in the envelope a sealed letter.

"If I die, or disappear suddenly, you'll learn who my murderer was by reading it. If, on the other hand, I live, and everything goes according to plan, I'll telegraph you permission to open it.

"As I say, the chances are heavily against me being correct in *all* my reasoning—and if I'm proved wrong, after dragging you all over to the island, what an idiot I shall appear.

"Besides that, there's still a lot of work to be done here. You must see Sturman again, and endeavour to shake his evidence. Also, according to our original theory, there is the accomplice to be tracked down yet.

"I promise you this," he added. "By continuing your present search you are doing everything possible to clear up the case. You're not *so much* on the wrong track as my actions may suggest."

"Very well," said the Superintendent with a smile. "I'll do as you say. I don't really relish the idea of going over to the island—I'm a rotten sailor. Incidentally, I'm getting all behind with my other work. Now as regards your letter—I'll promise not to open that until I get your wire."

"Or hear I have departed this world," reminded Hunt. "Though I hardly think I shall allow that

to happen. One near go in a case is more than enough for me."

He walked out to his car, the Superintendent following. "You'll be sure and book me that 'plane, won't you?" he said. "If I don't get it I shall miss the boat—and I have special reasons for wanting to catch it."

A moment later he had started the engine and slipped the gears into mesh. He drove recklessly all the way to London, and, to his knowledge, had his number taken by country policemen on no less than three occasions. But he had no time to stop and explain; explanation could come later if necessary.

Once in Town, he drove straight to Scotland Yard. He was granted an immediate audience by the Chief Commissioner.

When he had explained his theory, the Chief sat back thoughtfully in his chair.

"It's possible, Inspector," he admitted. "Possible, but hardly probable. Anyhow, you have my permission to go over—but if anything does come of your trip, for goodness' sake be careful. You're too valuable a man to take unnecessary risks."

Hunt lived in a suburb through which he had to drive on his way out to Croydon. He stopped at his lodgings for a few minutes to pack his bags.

The contents of one in particular might have excited comment among the habitués of the island had they been able to glance inside it. For it contained, among other things, a dictaphone of new and peculiar pattern, a pair of headphones of the type telephone operators use, a strong hack saw, a bunch of skeleton keys, and a well-oiled automatic. He

climbed into his 'plane just after six o'clock. The mechanic swung the propeller, and the engine responded straight away. A few moments later they started their short somewhat bumpy run over the drome, then the pilot pulled back his stick, and the machine, in answer to his movements, rose steadily into the air.

As they passed rapidly over London and the home counties, Hunt busied himself in writing his promised letter to the Superintendent.

He began at the very beginning, giving his views on the case in full. As Walker discovered, when later he opened the missive, these views were correct down to the smallest detail.

Just after eight they landed in Liverpool, where Hunt found he had still plenty of time in which to catch the boat.

Instead of proceeding leisurely to the dock, though, he tipped his taxi-driver ten shillings to make the journey at his best speed.

This the man did, and by 8.30 Hunt found himself on board the *Mona*, where he immediately took up a position from which he was able to scrutinise every oncoming passenger.

But his man did not put in an appearance. He was fated to take the trip to the island that he had thought up till now might easily prove to be unnecessary.

Once at Douglas, he decided that he had done enough for one day, so, after alighting from a taxi outside his hotel, he passed straight up to bed.

Early the next morning, as soon as it was light, he was awakened by the staccato roar of a racing

motor-cycle. He jumped out of bed and dressed hurriedly. This was, of course, the first morning of practising. He might as well see the fun.

Five minutes later he was in the roadway, walking towards the start. It was a trifle misty here; conditions were terrible on the mountain, they said, and it did not appear likely that any fast times would be returned.

He watched Jim start; saw him disappear into the mist with the speed of a veteran. Then after watching a few more men off, he decided to walk to Governor's Bridge to see Jim come round on the completion of his first lap.

Passing along the road behind the grand stand, he came to the famous bridge in under ten minutes.

Soon after he arrived the early starters began to appear. To his surprise, Jim arrived surprisingly early. With a squeal of brakes he half skidded the corner, accelerating violently immediately, in an endeavour to catch the man ahead.

Retracing his steps to the grand stand, he found Jim's lap speed chalked up—35 minutes 45 seconds. He ran his finger up his lap table $35 \text{ m. } 45\text{s.} = 63.3 \text{ m.p.h.}$

"A wonderful speed," he said aloud. "If he can do this on his first morning—and in dreadful climatic conditions—what will he be doing by race day?"

Not waiting to see the finish of the practising, he returned to his hotel, shaved, and otherwise tidied himself for breakfast.

There was a boat due in at nine o'clock. He was waiting on the quay to meet it. Again he scrutinised

every passenger, and again he was disappointed—an occurrence that was to be repeated many times in the next fortnight.

Once sure that his man had not arrived on the early boat, he began a tour of the hotels—and, at each hotel he visited, he endeavoured to come into contact with all the male guests; a difficult undertaking, as Douglas was filling rapidly. And in every case, before leaving, he carefully inspected the register; but in no case did he find the desired entry.

This was his programme daily now; first to watch the practising, then to see the boats in, and finally to spend the remainder of the day in a tour of the hotels and various racing camps, keeping his eyes and ears well open—but his tongue he kept well guarded.

He found time too, each morning, to visit the headquarters of the —— Sound Film Co. and inquire of their manager if Sir Henry Sandleson had yet put in an appearance.

The answer was always the same—No—it was doubtful whether he would be over; he was detained in London on private business, they believed.

But it was significant that there was one person already on the island whom he seldom let out of sight for any length of time, in spite of his other activities,—and that person was Jim Hucklesby.

Jim was staying at the Ceramo, the same hotel as himself. He met him at all hours of the day, congratulating him regularly on his fast improving speeds.

By the end of the first week's practising the lad had clocked a lap at over seventy, although on no

occasion had the conditions been really favourable for high speeds.

Another of Hunt's peculiarities that the "lads" would have commented on had they known of it was his extravagance in rooms.

Instead of being content to share one with another holiday-maker—for prices were high—he had actually gone so far as to take two rooms, one on each floor, and, as it happened, one over the other.

A question of wishing to be free from noise, they would have said, but they would have been wrong, for the Inspector could sleep like a log through the severest thunderstorm, and also, as a matter of fact, was occupying the one upstairs.

But the reason could have been partly supplied by Mr. Casson, the jovial manager, had he the permission and inclination to give it.

XXIV

THE RACE FOR THE SENIOR TOURIST TROPHY

By the last morning of practising Jim was the talk of the island. His fastest lap was only fractionally slower than that of Brown, an old hand with a life knowledge of the tricky Manxland course, whose engine had been tuned by Hocking, the works expert, acknowledged by most people to be finest tuner extant.

As a result, Jim found himself besieged with offers of employment at salaries the mention of which caused his head to swim. However, being of a stable disposition, he refused them one and all, deciding to wait until after the race before making his final choice.

But whilst Jim moved in an ecstasy of seventh heaven, Hunt daily became more despondent, till, on the day of the race for the Junior Trophy, it was hardly safe to approach him for fear of having one's head snapped off.

Jim saw the race from the stands, realising for the first time at what a terrific speed the faster men were travelling. But Hunt, who sat near at hand, seemed to take but little interest in the proceedings.

On the Wednesday came the light-weight race. This time, though, Jim was not in his place, having ridden out to Craig-ny-Baa on a friend's machine

to watch the riders' spectacular leaps down the mountain.

Hunt, however, did not move from the stands, though his eye seemed more on the crowds of spectators than the competitors.

In this race Brown had the misfortune to crash badly when leading, leaving Jim the hope of the Star camp for the big race on the Friday.

The Thursday found Hunt up unusually early. Any chance passer-by in the corridor outside would have been more than surprised to have found that he was spending the time he had gained by his early rising in an examination of the lock of his spare room—No. 44.

The remainder of that day he spent in keeping the closest possible watch upon Jim's movements; a watch he only relaxed when he had to visit the quay to see a boat in.

But when the last of Thursday's trippers to the Senior had been landed he began to feel again that his hopes had proved false, and that his early rising had been but so much wasted effort.

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Not a hundred miles from Liverpool is situated the club-house of the —— Light Aeroplane Club.

On the night in question it was unusually crowded—the Round Scotland Air Race had concluded there a few hours previously, and the weary competitors were loath to leave the comfort of the lounge. Indeed, many of them, including the winner, Pat Lloyd, intended staying there the night.

Two men were seated at a table in the far corner

of the room. The elder was a millowner, Jeff Gordon by name, and a prominent aeroplane enthusiast. A clever pilot, he had taken third place in the aforementioned race.

The younger man, Dickenson, was speaking. "Here comes Lloyd," he said, "looking as fresh as a daisy. His vitality seems amazing; no matter how gruelling the race, he always comes up smiling."

"Yes," Gordon replied. "He's got the stamina of a racehorse. I know *I* feel dead beat, and I don't mind admitting it. But Lloyd—no, nothing could tire the man."

The winner, a tall, bespectacled, rather fat-faced man, went up to the bar and ordered a drink.

"Hasn't raced for ages, has he?" asked Dickenson.

"No—quite three years," replied Gordon. "A funny thing—do you know I was third to him in this race last time he competed?"

"Remarkable. The old order changeth not," laughingly quoth Dickenson. "He used to race a lot in those days, I understand."

"Yes, he flew at every big meeting—it would be a little before you were old enough to take an active interest in the sport."

"Yes, I was hardly able to take an active interest, as you say, but I did take an interest all the same. He was one of my idols in those days—a sort of ideal I hoped some day to grow up and emulate."

"Well, you're well on the road to your goal. In another year or two you'll be a force to be reckoned with, at the rate you're coming along."

"Flatterer," replied Dickenson. "You know I'm

only mediocre—and that's what I always shall be. Just a plodder—a man who might win if all the good men dropped out."

"Nonsense," said Gordon. "You'll come on a lot when you've had a little more experience. Won't he, Mr. Lloyd?"

Lloyd, who was passing, stopped. "Yes, he's going to be 'hot stuff' some day—and that day isn't so far off either."

"Tired?" asked Gordon.

"Tired? No. I never allow myself to feel tired. But I'm off to bed soon, all the same—I'm getting off early. I'm going to have a look at the T. T. over in the island."

"Yes, it'll be a good race this year, I'm told. I'm only too sorry I can't spare the time to pop over myself."

Dickenson sat deep in a brown study. "Penny for your thoughts," said Gordon, when Lloyd had departed.

The younger man smiled. "They're not worth even that—I was merely wondering where I had seen a photo of Lloyd recently," he said.

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Dawn, dry roads, a warm June morning, and no mist.

These were the conditions Hunt found when he looked out of his bedroom window at about 4.30 the following morning. Everything pointed to the race being easily the fastest of the series.

He dressed leisurely and strolled down to the harbour. Two boats were due in early, and he hoped

that this time he would find his man among the passengers.

But when both loads of unshaven, laughing men and dishevelled, excited girls were ashore he found his optimism had been premature.

Unless his man had used the most effectual disguise, he was not on the island.

For a moment Hunt thought of returning to the mainland on the first departing boat; but, on reconsidering the question, he decided he might as well see the day's sport.

Half an hour later found him seated in the stands, bent on enjoying the race in spite of his disappointment.

The riders were lined up on one side of the roadway, their machines on the other (it was one of the early races after the massed start had been introduced), and the starter was shouting final instructions through his megaphone.

The hand of his watch crept slowly but surely towards the magic hour of ten.

Then suddenly the maroon boomed, and forty odd leather-clad figures sprinted across the broad section of road to their machines. A brief push before the engines started, then they were off.

As a spectacle it was magnificent; men and machines seemed as one being.

A minute later, and the ear-splitting noise they made, had faded, leaving the spectators approximately half an hour in which to decide among themselves who would be first man round.

Twenty-five minutes later the staccato roar of an open exhaust could be heard approaching.

But it was not a motor-cycle. Such a speed for the thirty-seven and a half mile lap was, of course, impossible. It was a little red monoplane, screeching its way just over the tree-tops.

It circled the grand stand twice before descending in a near-by field.

At that moment the faster of the riders could be heard approaching, and of all that vast crowd in the vicinity only one man appeared to take any further interest in the aeroplane—and that man was Inspector Hunt.

Pushing his way through the knots of people, he gained a piece of high ground, from which he was able to focus his glasses on the field in which the 'plane had landed.

The machine, he saw, had come down safely, and was taxi-ing back towards the road.

A minute later the pilot had climbed out of the cockpit and, after a look at some part of the engine, started to walk towards the road.

In less than five minutes he passed close by Hunt (who kept well out of sight) on his way to the pits.

The Yard man followed him at a discreet distance, studying his every action.

Once at the pits, he stopped, and wrote a note, which he handed to a Boy Scout who was standing near by. After a little monetary persuasion, the boy departed with it, heading for the direction in which Hunt was standing.

What ought he to do? the latter wondered. Follow the Scout or keep to his man?

He decided to compromise by attempting to stop the boy and persuade him to hand over the message.

This proved easier than he expected it would, as the boy did not even doubt his word that he was a police officer.

A glance at the note sufficed. It was to the manager of the Ceramo, booking a room for the night.

Producing a pencil from his pocket, Hunt scrawled "Room 44," and, underneath, his signature. Then, together with a tip, he handed the paper back to the boy.

He felt considerably relieved now. The handwriting, he felt sure, was that of the man for whose arrest he held a warrant. His choice of the Ceramo as his headquarters had been a lucky one.

The intercepting of the Scout had taken very little time, and he had not lost sight of his man the while. The man was walking on, passing slowly down the pits, his eye taking in all that was going on around.

Opposite the Star camp he halted. After watching the mechanics, particularly Bailey, for a moment, he spoke to the pit manager, who nodded, evidently replying in the affirmative.

Then, turning, he retraced his steps back to the grand stand.

Hunt waited until he had seated himself before taking up a position immediately behind him, from which he could keep him in view, and at the same time be as well out of sight himself as possible.

Indeed, to be on the safe side he bought a newspaper, behind which he would be able, should the necessity arise, to hide his features.

After a time his glance happened to fall idly on the picture page.

Almost the first thing that caught his eye was a photograph—the photograph of Pat Lloyd, the Round Scotland Air Race winner.

At first he could hardly believe his senses, so startling was his discovery. For the man seated so calmly only a few feet in front of him was the original of the photograph beyond doubt.

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Hardly had the last echoes of the maroon died away before Jim had started his heavy machine. He realised that with a massed start of nearly fifty riders a good get-away was essential if he was to have clear roads ahead of him.

Although he had drawn No. 35, and was placed a good sixty yards behind the first man, he managed, by superb riding, to force his way up to seventh place by the time he reached Quarter Bridge (1 mile).

Then he slowed somewhat, taking things comparatively easy for the rest of the thirty-seven and a half mile lap, knowing that the surest way to "nurse" a "hot-stuff" engine for its heart-breaking task is not to rev. it too unmercifully until it gets thoroughly warmed up.

Nevertheless, he picked up two more places before the grand stand came in view again, clocking a lap time of 29.45 s., which is a lap speed of 76.1 m.p.h.

Then on his second lap he began really to open out. Riding like a man possessed, he had crept up to fourth place by the end of it, this time clocking 29 minutes exactly, which equals a speed of 78.1 m.p.h.

The next lap he covered at precisely the same speed, and was rewarded by capturing third place.

But the men in front of him were veterans; mounted on two of the fastest machines in the island, mounts which give every promise of standing their riders' drastic handling. And the lead they held was one of over a minute.

On the completion of his fourth lap he stopped to refuel. The leaders, he learned, had done likewise. In thirty-five seconds he was away again.

Three laps to go; and nearly eighty seconds to make up. Could he do it? That was the question he asked himself a hundred times in the next few miles—and the answer every time was "Yes."

Another fast lap—29 minutes exactly. Consistency seemed to be his keynote. But the signal held out to him from his pit, a white F on a blackboard, meant faster still.

He was beginning to tire slightly. Surely he could stick it? Only two more laps.

His cornering was automatic now; he had subconsciously become part and parcel of his machine.

Once more the stands—once more he saw the little white F held out to him from his pit.

How could they expect any more? Surely his last lap was fast enough? He *must* be catching the leaders. Even in his tired state he knew it had been his fastest.

Still, he had to obey orders. Riding like an automaton, he unleashed a tigerish lap.

Those who saw it will carry the memory to their graves. His leap at Ballig Bridge was reported the most daring ever seen there; his fiendish bounds

down the mountain to Craig-ny-Baa were awe-inspiring; and according to the experts he must count himself extremely lucky in safely rounding Brandish Corner at the speed he took it.

But it was left to the finish to provide the biggest thrill of all.

He passed Cook, the second man, at Rectory Corner. Only a mile to go—and the leader, Robertson, in sight.

Victory was within his grasp. Tired, aching joints and blistered hands were temporarily forgotten. All that mattered now was the will to make a final effort.

At the Nook he left his braking for the approach to Governor's Bridge so late that all who saw him could but think disaster imminent. But, no—he had the machine well under control, and had judged his speed to the *n*th degree.

Then Governor's Bridge. A violent skid, which he held—then full bore again. He had his man now—not ten yards separated them—and the remaining three-quarters of a mile of his route was straight and tree-lined.

But his rival's machine was still capable of amazing speed. Only by squeezing himself into the smallest possible space was he able to lessen the wind resistance, and make an impression on his leader.

Two hundred yards to the line; and Jim had crept up level to Robertson's back wheel. What a finish for the spectators!

One hundred yards to go, and they were riding bar to bar.

Then over the line. The crowd rose to them as

one man. The most exciting finish ever seen to a long-distance road race—either here or elsewhere.

And few but the judge could say *who* was the winner. But it was Jim—the victor by a wheel's breadth—after a last lap in 28 minutes, or, for the benefit of the uninitiated, 80.9 m.p.h.

XXV

ZERO HOUR

THE race over, Hunt lost sight of his man in the rush from the stands, very few remaining seated to see the third man, Cook, finish.

But the Inspector was not unduly worried; he guessed that he would find him amongst the crowd of admirers gathered around the Star pit.

He was correct in this, as he found when he arrived there. Pat Lloyd was in the front of the crush, talking to the excited manager.

As he watched, Hunt saw him take a card from his case, scribble a few words on it, then hand it to the man, who pocketed it with a nod.

Then, fearful of being seen, the Yard man hurried back through the crowds of aimlessly wandering spectators to the town and the Ceramo hotel.

Once safely within the precincts of the hostelry, he hurried to his room, where he took up a position by the window from which he could see plainly all who entered or left by the front door.

He had not long to wait, for within five minutes Lloyd arrived; alone.

Only a short time elapsed before the slamming of a door told him that Lloyd had been shown into No. 44, immediately below him, as he had requested on the card he had taken from the Boy Scout.

Passing to his dressing-table, Hunt picked up his

automatic, carefully inspecting the mechanism before slipping half a dozen bullets into the clip in the butt.

Then from his bag he took up his handcuffs, dropping them into a handy pocket. His preparations completed, he moved back to the window.

Again he had not long to wait. A flushed and dirty-looking Jim Hucklesby rode up on a borrowed motor-cycle (his own was being dismantled by the A.C.U. officials in accordance with the rules), which he leaned against the hotel wall.

A moment later, and he, also, had entered by the front door.

Going back to his dressing-table, Hunt dropped into a chair, after clipping on his headphones, which were connected to the special dictaphone already mentioned, and pulled down a little switch.

The microphone was, of course, cleverly hidden in the room below. He could hear Lloyd quite plainly—he was pacing restlessly about the room.

Then came the sound of a knock on the door. "Come in," called Lloyd.

Jim entered, closing the door softly behind him.

Lloyd started the conversation. "Did I see Inspector Hunt here?" he asked.

"Probably," replied Jim. "He's here. If you value your life, you'd better leave at once."

"I shall leave to-morrow," Lloyd answered calmly, almost haughtily, it seemed. "I have arranged to see the prize-giving. It'll take more than an addle-brained Inspector of Police to deter me, I can assure you. I'm Pat Lloyd, the celebrated airman—everyone knows that."

"Yes," agreed Jim. "You certainly look the part."

"Look the part? I like that." His voice rose. "*I am Lloyd*. For years I've kept up my dual identity—I guessed it would prove useful one day. I am well known as Lloyd; in fact, I can call hundreds of witnesses to prove that I am that worthy airman. I am in no danger whatsoever." Then, more softly—"Now I suppose I must tell you why I sent for you.—To congratulate you on the splendid race you rode to-day."

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The conversation was at an end; Jim was taking his leave.

Hunt slipped off his 'phones and tiptoed to the window.

The Senior winner came out through the door, looking somewhat dazed, started up his machine, and rode rapidly away.

Zero hour for Hunt had arrived.

Going softly back to the dictaphone, Hunt started it up. He did not expect to find it a valuable help to him, but he was not taking any chances; if his plans did go wrong, Scotland Yard would have a complete record of all that took place.

Then, passing to the door, he stole out, tiptoeing along the corridor and down the stairs, then, even more stealthily, along the passage to room No. 44.

His hand on the weapon in his pocket, he stooped, gluing his eye to the keyhole.

What he saw satisfied him. Lloyd was sitting in the far corner of the room, back to the door, reading a newspaper.

His arrest would be a matter of the utmost ease.

Rising to his full height, Hunt withdrew his automatic (not for nothing had he already tested his adversary's mettle), slipped back the safety catch, and laid his hand on the door-knob.

Then, bracing himself to meet any emergency, he flung open the door, at the same time advancing into the room.

"Sir Charles Stafford," he started, "I—" But he did not finish the sentence, for, with a thud, something struck him violently on the back of the head, sending him sprawling, an inert mass, on to the floor.

XXVI

CONFESSION

AFTER what seemed an eternity, Hunt started to recover consciousness. Something cold and clammy was wrapped around his forehead, and, as his senses returned, he felt the trickle of water running down his face.

Dazedly he attempted to lift his arm to brush the bandage aside. To his surprise, he found he could not move it. This discovery, no doubt, hastened his return to full consciousness.

Dropping his head forward, he saw that he was bound hand and foot to the chair in which he was seated. Then, lifting his eyes, he sought his captor.

Sir Charles Stafford, *alias* Pat Lloyd, was standing by the fireplace, watching him closely, an amused expression in his eyes.

Presently, seeing his victim had recovered, he spoke, slowly and deliberately, weighing each word before giving it utterance.

"Yes—you're quite right. I am Sir Charles Stafford—the murderer of my deadliest enemy, Dennis Evans—the stealer of his wife—and the slayer of Constable James."

He paused a moment before continuing. "It would have been far better for you though, Inspector, had you not made your discovery—it will only mean my adding to my growing list of crimes—for

now I must also become the killer of Inspector Hunt."

Hunt started to reply. But no words were forthcoming; he was tightly gagged.

Sir Charles, observing his efforts, moved towards him.

"I'm sorry to inconvenience you," he said, "but I'm afraid that for my own safety you must remain gagged. For all I know, you may have some more of your sleuth-hounds within call."

He thought for a moment. "Have you?" he asked. "Answer me truthfully, and I'll see what I can do about it."

Hunt shook his head.

"No, eh? Righto. If I take off the gag, will you give me your word of honour that you will not attempt to call for help?"

Hunt nodded again; this time in the affirmative.

Sir Charles moved nearer to him. "Understand this. If you fail me, I'll shoot you like a dog, bound hand and foot as you are."

He drew his revolver, covering the defenceless man. "Remember, you're on your honour," he warned again. "If you shout, you'll be a corpse before the sound has had time to leave the room."

Hunt nodded. The situation was desperate. Like a fool, he had blundered again, and fallen unsuspectingly into another trap.

Sir Charles was removing the gag. "You're probably wondering how you came to be caught so easily," he said. "Well, I'll tell you."

His eyes took on an expression of savage delight. "You see that weight on the floor by the door?"

Hunt nodded again.

"That's what hit you. You see, I expected your visit, so I took the precaution of arranging a suitable reception for you. Rather crude, I admit. A mere schoolboy's trick—but effective nevertheless."

Hunt could but agree with the truth of this statement. A 28 lb. weight dropped from the height of some feet on to a person's head as he passes through a door can be relied on to cause a knockout.

"And, in case you entertain any hopes of being rescued, I'll tell you now that I took the liberty of locking the door once I had you safely inside." Then—as an afterthought—he added, "If by any chance anyone *does* try to break in, I shall have no option but to terminate your life immediately.

"As you may also be wondering why I've kept you alive to tell you all this, it's only because I feel I owe you a grudge. If it hadn't been for your interference, my poor Peggy would have been alive to-day. So this afternoon, when I saw my chance to delay your agony, I took it."

He paused for a space. "I suppose you have discovered just how I carried out the murder of Dennis Evans?" he queried.

Hunt realised he was fighting for time—anything he could say to delay the fateful moment increased his chance of escape.

"No," he replied, "to be candid, I'm puzzled still. I have only an inkling of the truth."

"Then," Sir Charles began boastingly, "as I've a certain amount of admiration for your work, I'll condescend to tell you how I did it.

"The whole thing was pre-arranged, as, I expect

you know. I've been scheming how best I could rid the world of Evans for several years past. But I'd better start at the very beginning I suppose.

"As you have undoubtedly heard, I was studying aeronautics on the Continent after I came down from Oxford.

"I was young and irresponsible in those days—and, worst of all, practically penniless. Unfortunately, though, my tastes were expensive—too expensive, I'm afraid.

"I was rather heavily in debt. Something had to be done, and done quickly. I had to get money somehow—either honestly or dishonestly. It didn't matter which—as long as I got it.

"I had spent some hours in the Montmartre district of Paris one evening, and had got into conversation with a stranger—rather a peculiar type of man; he seemed in deadly fear of something all the evening. But he had money to burn—that was the great thing.

"About midnight we left the place together. We neither of us had far to go, as he lived in the Rue St. Lazare and I in the Rue de Lorette. So our ways were the same for part of the walk.

"After a few minutes we came to the Rue de Châteaudun, where he had to branch off to the left.

"Then, after bidding him good night and arranging to meet him on the morrow, I set off on the remaining hundred yards or so of my journey.

"Hardly had I started, though, when I heard a shout for help from my friend of the café.

"Turning hurriedly, I ran as fast as I could in the direction in which he had departed.

"I had not far to go. I found him, back to a doorway, stoutly defending himself with his walking-stick against three men whom I took to be Apaches.

"I was always ready for a scrap in those days—nothing pleased me more than a good rough-and-tumble.

"Well, to cut a long story short, my arrival turned the tide of the battle (which had begun to run badly for my friend with the walking-stick), his attackers turning tail and bolting.

"Then my friend, who, I afterwards learned, was known as Monsieur Duprée, insisting that I had saved his life from an attempt he had feared for some weeks, made me accompany him to his house for a 'nightcap.'

"On the way there he repeated again and again how indebted he was to me, for without my help, he said, he would have long since been a corpse. Then he made a startling statement. He would, as part of my reward, show me the way to make a fortune—a fortune beyond my wildest dreams.

"A little later we arrived at the house. It was a wonderful place, furnished regardless of cost, with a host of well-trained servants everywhere.

"He caught my admiring glance. 'You're young,' he said to me, 'and you, also, could do with great wealth such as I have?'

"I assured him again that I could indeed—that I was at the moment in deadly need of even 500 francs. 'If you can show me the way to get even that,' I said, 'you will more than repay me for my help in the little affair we had in the Rue St. Lazare.'

"‘Wait a minute, my boy,’ he replied. ‘I have promised to do something for you and I will keep my word. But I must know more of you first. You may not like my scheme, so it would not do for me to tell it to you yet. Tell me now about yourself—all there is to tell—both good and bad.’

"‘I told him everything—of my love of adventure; my ambition to become famous as an airman; my insuppressible love of luxury; my title, which had so far proved but a millstone round my neck.

"‘When I had finished, he was more than delighted. ‘You’re my man all right,’ he said. ‘Meet me here to-morrow evening at eight o’clock. I must have time to check your statements.’

"‘With that he bid me *au revoir* and escorted me to the door.

"‘I was at his place the next evening at the appointed hour. He had checked my statements and appeared perfectly satisfied.

"‘He came straight to business. He was, he said, the head of one of the big international dope gangs. The men from whom I had helped him to escape were not Apaches, but members of a rival gang.

"‘The proposition he had to offer me was briefly this. He was finding it increasingly difficult to hold his connection in England. The customs officers were becoming more and more astute, and the quantity of dope he could safely run out into the country was decreasing monthly.

"‘With the aid of my title and education I could help him to rebuild the business. He would furnish me with enough capital to take a house near London, and also buy me a couple of aeroplanes.

"I was to spend a year in getting well known as a pilot before my job began in earnest.

"I would then have to take charge of a celebrated London dope gang which haunted the Tottenham Court Road area. I was to be responsible for the actual smuggling of the dope, bringing it by air from various places on the Continent. As I should have my own private landing-ground, I should be able to keep my movements secret, and so avoid trouble with the customs.

"Well, to cut a long story short, I accepted his offer immediately, leaving Paris within the week to take a place at Harrow.

"The remainder of that year I spent in undertaking spectacular flights and competing in various air races, which considerably added to my prestige—and also, to a certain extent, to my income.

"Then I turned my attention to the dope-running proper. In a couple of years I had made a considerable pile—this in spite of my heavy expenses, for I still kept up my flying.

"Then came the news that Duprée was dead—had been murdered, would be more correct.

"This meant the splitting up of the international gang as we knew it—but it was a red-letter day for me. It meant that I became the 'boss' of, instead of manager of, the English branch—the Tottenham Court Road traffickers.

"It was about this time that I first met Peggy—Mrs. Evans as you know her. She was living in Wealdstone—quite close to me. We got very keen on one another right from the start. If ever there was a case of 'love at first sight,' this was it.

"All was going well until, one day when I called for Peggy, she refused to see me. Later the same day I saw an announcement of her engagement to a certain Dennis Evans. I knew she had been friendly with the man before I came on the scene, but I thought all was over between them long since.

"The announcement simply flabbergasted me; but worse was to follow.

"In the course of my inquiries I found that Dennis was the head of the notorious Chelsea dope gang. And the moment I heard that I began to plan my revenge.

"Then, to cap everything, Peggy brought him round to my place, suggesting that I should golf with them.

"Why I eventually consented I can't say to this day. It must have been solely because her proposal offered me a few more hours in her company.

"I disliked Dennis intensely from the very first moment I set eyes on him. It was only natural, I suppose. I had already prepared myself to hate him.

"But I did not show it; it suited my plans to play up to him. I sensed a mystery, and determined to get to the bottom of it.

"And so it went on. One invitation led to another. I gradually began to get on more and more intimate terms with him, with either golf, or bridge, or dances, practically every day; while he, in his turn, became very interested in flying.

"Then came the day of the wedding. By this time I was inwardly a seething volcano—the slightest excuse and I should have broken out into violent eruption.

"I had Peggy to myself for a few minutes just before the ceremony (for the first time since the announcement of her engagement), and begged her not to go through with the affair, for I could see she was on the verge of a breakdown. But my appeal was in vain—she resolutely refused to change her plans.

"Then, the wedding over, I turned to my old love, the air, in an endeavour to forget the past. But it was no good—of course I could not forget.

"So I decided to end it all—hence my Australian and Atlantic flights. Again it was not to be—I was fated to win through.

"I had completely lost touch with Peggy now—fifteen months' absence can help to cure the severest heart-ache. But I decided not to return to Harrow; it would bring back too many painful memories.

"About this time Forest Court came into the market. I liked the place the moment I saw it, and, as money was no object, I decided to purchase it. Within a fortnight I had moved in.

"A few afternoons later I set off for a round of golf at Highcliffe. Who should I meet there but Peggy Evans—alone.

"She was feeling rather down, it seemed, and, to my surprise, started to unburden her troubles to me. Once she had started she said more than she intended. In a few minutes it all came out—the reason of her sudden engagement. *She had consented to it to save me!*

"It appeared that Dennis had discovered my connection with the Tottenham Court Road dope gang and had gone to her with irrevocable proof of my doings. He had then threatened to hand this proof

over to the authorities unless—and it was a very big unless—unless she agreed to marry him.

“And, as you know, her choice was marriage—sacrificing herself to a man she did not love—a man she probably even loathed—all to save *me* from years of imprisonment.

“In that moment I saw everything—saw how Evans had become friendly with me merely to keep an eye on my movements—to blackmail me perhaps, if the opportunity arose, and to scare me out of business.

“And there and then I swore to kill him, kill him slowly but surely—ruin his business as he had ruined my life, and finally, under the cloak of friendship, send him to the most terrible death I could conceive.”

XXVII

CONFESSION (*continued*)

As things turned out, it was fated to be simple. The Evanses were living within easy reach, so now *I* was able to keep my eye on *him*.

"I had completely reorganised my gang, and I am certain no living man could have connected me with it; indeed, I am sure that even Dennis believed my story that I had made a fortune from my flights—a true statement, I must remark in passing—and had retired from active business.

"Without undue trouble, I managed to get one of the Chelsea men on my side. He did not, at first, like to give his own companions away, but the reward I offered was too tempting for him to refuse.

"So, from time to time, he sent me names—names of men the police would catch red-handed.

"These I gave to my old friend and companion in crime, Claude Gascoigne, who, posing as 'Pro Patria,' forwarded them to Scotland Yard.

"Evans stuck to his guns to the last, I must admit; even although he had long been fighting with his back to the wall.

"Then, after a two years' battle, came ruin.

"Until now Peggy had not relished the idea of murder—it was only her fears for my safety that had prevented her from eloping with me long before.

"But her husband's loss of his money proved the

last straw. Like me, she could not live except in luxury. And, to make her fight the easier, I had been spending money like water each time she was in my company. So she fell at last, agreeing to play her part, whatever the consequences.

"The scheme I proposed was briefly this. We would let the world think I was dead—the result of an air accident. She too, and Dennis, would also have been presumed to have perished at the same time.

"Then, with all three of us officially dead—and me buried, with civic honours, maybe, into the bargain—we should be free to set up, under a new name, as man and wife, wherever we pleased. As I pointed out, if we were careful we should run no risk whatever.

"This simple little plot took any amount of evolving—but the reward was too great to risk making the slightest mistake.

"For a whole week, I worked night and day—but at last I had it perfect. For every move we had to make I thought out three alternatives, so, if things went wrong at any stage, we should still be able to make our get-away in comfort.

"I arranged for Peggy and Dennis to accompany me on a tour to the U.S.A. By a certain amount of scheming I also arranged for us to catch the *Tro-ganic* at Plymouth at six o'clock on the morning of May the 23rd.

"After planning that we should fly there, leaving Lymington at 3 A.M. or thereabouts, and getting Dennis and Peggy to agree to come to a party at my place overnight, the rest was comparatively easy.

"Dennis and I were both about the same build; we both wore identical flying suits—I had seen to that by changing my old one—and, most important of all, we both had false teeth.

"All I had to do was to get him into a complete change of my clothing, and the trick was as good as done.

"I will not trouble you by going into details as to how this was accomplished, but, briefly, I tipped him out of a motor-boat into the lake—myself as well, for that matter."

"What time was this?" asked Hunt, hoping to lengthen the story which, he felt, was rapidly drawing to a close. If he could only keep him talking, all might yet turn out well.

He could not help recalling a slogan he had seen stuck up in Whitfield's office at the Yard: "When you're feeling down in the mouth, think of Jonah—he came out all right."

"Oh—about 10.30," answered his adversary, "but that doesn't really matter. The great point was, Dennis had to dress in my clothes; his had all gone on ahead to Plymouth—Peggy saw to that.

"I had sent all my servants to bed; there was no chance of this changing of clothing being discovered.

"Then, on a pretext of taking his wet things down to the kitchen to dry, I hurried along to the furnace (central heating furnace) and threw them into it.

"By 2.30, the time that the servants were about again, he had donned his flying kit, so his borrowed suit was completely hidden.

"Then, I'm sorry to say, came our first mistake. I refer to the exchanging of suit-cases by that drunken

fool Day. In a way I was hoist with my own petard there, for I drugged his drinks to get him out of the way for a few hours.

"Now comes a little move that I should have mentioned earlier. After the burning of Dennis' clothes I went up to my research rooms in the attic—to the room I call my art room—I suppose you've inspected it?—bringing down a wax model of Peggy's head and shoulders that I had made. Although it was of my own fashioning, I think I can justly claim that it was perfect, even to the leather flying coat-collar with which I finished it off. This I concealed in the locker of my 'Moth.'

"Then I hurried up the road to Mrs. Thornton's house to borrow her car. I was very friendly with her, and I had taken the liberty of providing myself with a duplicate key of her garage lock.

"I ran no risk, as the road is always deserted at this hour—and I knew Mrs. Thornton was away. In case you think differently, I can assure you that I had a reserve move up my sleeve—had I been unable to obtain her car, I should have changed my plans accordingly.

"However, I had no trouble, and obtained the Singer, which I drove up the Green Lane, where I turned it, leaving it in readiness.

"Next, I turned out the contents of Peggy's attaché-case, filling it instead with banknotes.

"At this stage I'd better explain that, whenever we were all flying together, Peggy insisted on travelling in my 'plane. Dennis had never objected to this—he thought the world of her, I must admit, and always let her have her own way.

"This fact, as you will see later, helped me with my plans considerably; incidentally, it also helped to confuse the police when they set to work to solve the mystery."

He looked at Hunt amusedly. "I should like to know what Walker had to say on the subject, but I must forgo the pleasure—time presses."

The Inspector winced involuntarily. Confound the man! Why must he keep reminding him of the fact?

"Now, to come to our actual departure. Day, who had recovered somewhat, as I said, changed bags with Peggy—exchanged a toothbrush and pyjamas for a quarter of a million in hard cash.

"The loss alone, though serious, would not have hindered us much—it only meant us going to the trouble of getting more. I'm sure, though, that if Peggy had not been so excited and nervous she would have noticed the lightness of her bag and remedied matters.

"After we had taxied out of the hangar, I managed to pass Dennis and get to the turning-point on the other side of the park some time before him. Not that it mattered much; it was quite dark behind the landing-light. Bailey could not see what was going on there.

"As I said, I arrived first. Peggy immediately climbed out, ran to the power-shed where we generate the electric current for this part of the estate—I had instructed her what to do beforehand—and pulled up the main switch, plunging the park into darkness.

"By this time Dennis had also taxied up. Everything was ready for me to stage my fade-out.

"Walking quickly over to him, I hit him on the head with a short, iron bar. If you were free to go and search," he added tauntingly, "you'd probably discover it lying in some furze-bushes not far from the power-house, for that's where I threw it after it had served its purpose. But as you're not—and not likely to be—I'm only wasting time by mentioning the fact.

"Of course, my blow only stunned him—I did not intend to let him die without experiencing the agony I had planned for him.

"So then I dragged him unceremoniously from his 'plane, immediately starting to turn out the contents of his pockets.

"As soon as I had finished, a few things I always carried went in the place of the things I had removed—my watch, wallet, keys, handkerchief, and one or two other odds and ends that, I see, you did not even trouble to produce at the inquest, so sure were you that the body was mine.

"Then, quickly, I pulled out his false teeth. Extracting my own unusual set—I had another plain set close at hand to replace them—I pushed them into his mouth. Next, I strapped an old, spare parachute round his body—and the unconscious man was ready for the end. All that remained for me to do was to drag him to the 'Moth,' and drop him in the front seat.

"Then, going back to the monoplane, I carefully set the controls. And, after making sure that everything was all right, I opened the throttle, sending

it off on its own in the manner of a schoolboy's model.

"I had flown the 'plane many times myself, and I felt sure that it would take off safely—but I must confess it was rather a nerve-racking moment for me; if it should crash, it would be sealing Bailey's death-warrant."

He looked at Hunt queerly. "You see, from the beginning I determined to stop at nothing. I had so much to gain and so little to lose. If, as I have said, the 'plane had crashed before leaving the precincts of the park, Bailey would, almost certainly, have run over to the wreckage.

"When he had discovered, as he was bound to discover, that Dennis was not in the cockpit, it would have meant either silencing him, or years of black-mail, or even imprisonment. As you'll probably agree, silencing him would have been by far the best of the alternatives."

He ruminated for a moment on the method of the silencing. "I could easily have stunned him, as I had Dennis, and placed them both amongst the debris before putting a match to it. It would have been all over in a few seconds.

"'Bailey,' the papers would have said, 'died a hero, sacrificing his life in a vain endeavour to save Mr. Evans.' I might even have dedicated a bed to his memory in the local hospital." He laughed at the thought.

"But I'm wandering. The necessity did not arise. The 'plane took off perfectly, Peggy, of course, switching off the light at the main so that Bailey was unable to see that the 'plane was empty.—I omitted to mention that she could time her actions

perfectly, as there is a little window on the park side of the shed, through which she could see me more or less clearly, as I was between her and the brilliant beam of the landing-light.

"Then came my turn. Just before I got to the illuminated portion of the park, Peggy played her part once more. This gave me the opportunity to turn back, and go over and curse Bailey—the noise of my exhaust, coupled with the violence of my language, distracting his attention from the sound of Peggy starting the Singer in the Green Lane.

"Of course, Bailey swore at the inquest that Peggy was then in the 'plane.—He was completely deceived by my wax effigy of her, which I had pushed over the head of her unconscious husband.—He even swore he saw me speak to her—what he didn't notice, poor boob, was that she didn't reply.

"Next time, of course, I took off in fine style; the light remaining on to let Bailey see the flowing hair of my model, and assume Peggy was still in her place.

"I flew inland for a few minutes after getting clear of Lymington, to give Peggy time to get to Totland Corner. Then, when I saw by her headlights that she had reached Highcliffe, I manœuvred the 'plane until I was over the meadow the papers refer to as Angels.

"It was my plan now to set the 'plane on fire, escape myself by parachute—I always carry one, except when I'm flying over the sea—and leave my half-unconscious victim to perish in the flames.

"I had hoped that the torture of the blazing petrol would arouse him somewhat before the end—giving

him time to enjoy his roasting—but not time to allow him to attempt to jump.

"Unfortunately, again my plans miscarried. He must have long since recovered consciousness, and, recognising the seriousness of his position, was quietly awaiting his chance to make a fight for life.

"My idea was to take the effigy of Peggy from his head and place it in my cockpit. This would prevent it melting over Dennis' face, where it would perhaps have left traces.—Also, guarded by the protecting film of wax, his features would undoubtedly have been saved from much of the certain disfigurement in the inevitable crash.

"But, as I say, he had already recovered full consciousness.

"As I pulled the effigy off and dropped it at my feet, he rose from his seat, attacking me savagely.

"It was all over quite quickly. He was weak from the effects of his blow, and I had time to draw my revolver. One shot settled the affair.

"As my petrol tanks were filled to their full capacity, I didn't worry much, as I knew that in all probability his remains would be so charred that the bullet-wound would pass undetected.

"Then I fired the 'plane and jumped, leaving the blazing machine to crash when and where it liked between Angels and the sea.

"My leap was a success—the parachute opened without trouble. I landed in the far corner of Angels, the cows stampeding like wildfire in their fright.

"Here I folded my parachute. There was little wind, so the task was easy.

"Then I walked across the meadow towards Totland Corner—hence the single set of footprints."

It was evident to Hunt that Sir Charles had been keeping in close touch with the case through the papers.

"Then, I'm sorry to say, I was challenged by Constable James. He knew me, of course, so it was imperative to the success of my scheme that he be silenced.

"After making sure that he *was* dead, I continued, down by the hedge, to Totland Corner. A moment later Peggy arrived with the car. Our plans by now were practically assured of a successful conclusion—all that remained to be done was fix our make-up.

"We drove to Peggy's summer bungalow on the banks of the Avon, and there, after helping her to become a pretty brunette, I was transformed temporarily into Dennis Evans, in case of accidents.

"As it happened, it was a wise move, for the garage man, I understand, identified me as Evans.

"Then, following a carefully planned route, we reached the village of Hanley.

"Almost immediately after our arrival we discovered the loss of our money. Although not terribly serious, it was a most regrettable occurrence. I decided to make an attempt to retrieve it.

"Hence my appearance at my own inquest where I hoped to learn what had become of our missing suit-case besides ascertaining whether any suspicions had arisen with regard to the identity of the body found in the 'plane.

"Then, hearing no reference to the finding of the money, I thought there was just a chance that Day

had discovered his mistake before leaving my place, and that the bag had been left at Forest Court, unopened. That evening I returned to Lymington, disguised as my cousin, Henry Sandleson, who is, I hear, under the impression that he is a baronet.

"I took Sturman in well, my little experience of this kind of thing standing me in good stead.—But the money, I found, was not on the premises. Disappointed, I returned to Hanley, as I had come, in Mr. Watkin's car.

"Later, of course, came the second tragedy of my life—the loss of my poor Peggy—a loss for which, Inspector, I, rightly or wrongly, hold you responsible—a loss for which I have condemned you to death.

"After this terrible catastrophe I decided to fall back on my last line of defence—to appear again openly as Pat Lloyd, the racing airman, the rôle I had created as a bolt-hole in my early days with the dope gang.

"I thought in this I was secure—how you found me out I can't for the life of me imagine."

"Quite by accident," replied Hunt. "I happened to gaze into the window of a ladies' hairdressers."

"A ladies' hairdressers. I don't see the connection."

Despite the thin thread by which his life was hanging, Hunt laughed. "In this particular window there happened to be a lifesize wax model of the head and shoulders of a woman. That immediately suggested that Mrs. Evans wasn't in your 'plane at all."

"But then—why did you come to the Island?"

"Well—it's rather a difficult question to answer

but I fully expected you'd be here to see Jim ride. And I knew that if he won you wouldn't be able to resist congratulating him in person. That's all there is to it. He won, and you sent for him. My deductions were correct."

"Clever. Damned clever," conceded Sir Charles. "But now, I repeat, time presses. I'm afraid I must bring this farce to an end."

He looked at his revolver. "I've never used a silencer in so small a room before—I suppose it will be effective?"

"Quite," replied Hunt quietly. "It will make less noise than the drawing of a champagne cork." As he spoke he was looking beyond Sir Charles to the door. Was he mistaken, or did the knob move slightly? No, it was no mistake—the knob *was* moving.

"Just a moment," he continued. "Don't think I'm afraid to die—I'm not—but, before I do, I'd like to know what made Gascoigne give his own men away to Scotland Yard. Your name was included, you know."

Sir Charles smiled. "That was purely for our own convenience. Gascoigne had taken over the gang—I had no further use for it—I was quitting the game for good. He imagined that these men were being too closely watched by the police, and, fearing that they might be arrested any minute, to prevent any danger to himself he decided to dispose of them all at one foul swoop.

"You see, he thought it would place him above suspicion, and at the same time give confirmation—

should any be needed—of my demise. In plain English, it was a put-up job.

"I can hardly credit it myself, but Gascoigne tells me that the reverse has actually been the result. Since the arrests, he has had more police attention than ever."

"Then you mean Gascoigne knew of your murderous plans?" Hunt queried boldly, his eyes once more straying to the door.

It had started to open now. Sir Charles was still standing back to it, totally unaware of his impending danger.

"Yes. He knew. He was what you call in your police jargon 'an accessory after the fact.' But what difference does that make, pray may I ask?"

"All the difference in the world. He'll have to stand with you on the scaffold. You don't really think you're going to get away with this, do you?" asked Hunt, still in the same quiet tone. "Granted, you *will* kill me—but don't you think the Yard knows now whose body was actually in the blazing 'Moth'? Don't you think too that the police of the world are on the look-out for Sir Charles Stafford, *alias* Pat Lloyd, the racing airman—a double murderer?"

"Possibly," granted the baronet, with a laugh—still unaware that the door was more than half open, and that, framed in the aperture, stood Jim Huckleby, a heavy stick in his hand. "But don't you think I shall counteract these plans?"

"In a few hours' time I shall bear no more resemblance to either Sir Charles Stafford or Pat Lloyd than you do."

His voice changed. "I'm sorry, Inspector. Now you've told me so much it will perhaps be wisest for me to hurry." Then, more gently—"Don't you think it would be best for you to close your eyes?"

"No," replied Hunt. "I prefer to die with them open, like a man."

"As you will, Inspector," his torturer said, starting to raise the weapon. "I too should prefer it that way. Now," he added callously, "just think what my poor Peggy must have thought as she crashed through those level-crossing gates: 'A moment more and I shall have crossed the Vale.'"

But even as he spoke two things happened, both of which coupled together helped to change the conventional ending to a murder case.

One was that Inspector Hunt fainted—whether from relief, or the after-effects of his blow, it is hard to say; and the other—simply that Jim sprang.

XXVIII

EXPIATION

THIS time Hunt recovered consciousness more quickly. He could almost have cried for joy when he saw Sir Charles lying unconscious on the floor.

Jim, he noticed, was stooping down, bathing the bleeding wound. Apparently Sir Charles had turned at the last moment, catching the blow on his unprotected forehead.

"Bravo," shouted the Inspector, or, rather, the Inspector attempted to shout, for again no sound passed his lips. *The gag had been slipped into his mouth once more.*

This time it was obvious that Jim was to blame. Seeing the Yard man had recovered, he looked up.

"Sorry, Inspector," he began. "I must apologise for my ungentlemanly conduct, but I can't have you interfering. This is my affair now. I've pulled you out of a tight corner, and that's as much as you can expect."

Without another glance at the irate Inspector, he turned his attention again to the unconscious man.

For some moment he worked in silence, applying bandage after bandage. At last his efforts were rewarded; Sir Charles began to stir.

His amazing vitality soon pulled him round. "What has happened?" he gasped, staring in astonishment at the still bound and gagged Inspector.

Then, glancing aside, he saw Jim—a white-faced, stern-looking Jim, armed with his own revolver, the business end of which was pointing menacingly in his direction. "Don't move—stay where you are if you value your life," the lad ordered.

Sir Charles, who had been on the point of rising, obeyed.

Jim spoke again. "I shall give you ten minutes to get over the effects of your knock-out—you'd better make good use of it. Remember, you are not to move or speak."

Going back to a chair, where he could wait in comfort and at the same time cover his man, Jim pulled out his watch.

Slowly the hand crept forward. The ticking of the timepiece was the only sound that broke the silence of the room.

Presently Jim stood up, replaced his watch, and spoke again.

"Mr. Lloyd," he said deliberately, "are you feeling better now?"

"Yes, thanks," Sir Charles replied. "I'm feeling O.K."

"How did you get here?" asked Jim.

"By 'plane," answered Sir Charles.

"Where is your 'plane?"

"Not far from here—by the back of the grand stand."

"Right. Now, Mr. Lloyd, I want you to understand that unless I was heavily indebted to you I shouldn't be doing this.

"My motor-cycle is outside. It's less than five minutes' ride to your 'plane. To cover accidents,

I'll allow you seven. I'm giving you a sporting chance. In seven minutes exactly I shall release Inspector Hunt. You know what that'll mean—five minutes later the police of the world will be warned. Now go—take my motorcycle—don't thank me—*go*, while the going's good."

Sir Charles had risen to his feet, facing Jim. "Thanks," he said. "You're a sport. Now listen. One good turn deserves another. Before I came over here I took the precaution of drawing up a will. As you know, I have no relatives—that is, relatives I care for. You are the sole beneficiary under this will. It is lodged with Barclays Bank, Liverpool—in the name of Lloyd. Once again I thank you. Good-bye."

A moment later he had gone, leaving the Inspector more livid with rage than ever. But as he passed through the door Hunt noticed him glance hard at the useless lock. What a slip he had made! The most casual inspection would have revealed the fact that the steel bolt had been sawn off flush with the door edge.

Again Jim glanced at his watch.

In vain the angry Inspector squirmed in his chair, squirmed till the cord cut deep into his flesh.

But Jim neither moved nor spoke until the full seven minutes had elapsed. Then, moving over to Hunt, he began, "I suppose I must place myself under arrest, Inspector? But before I do so I'm going to ask you not to get too excited for a few minutes. Mr. Lloyd will take a good half-hour to reach land. By that time, even if you take things calmly, all stations will have been warned. That's all."

As he removed the gag, Hunt gave vent to his passion. "You damned little fool," he started wildly, "you've done something clever this time, to be sure!"

Jim remained calm. "So saving your life was 'something clever,' was it?"

Hunt's anger cooled somewhat. "I'm sorry," he said, "but nevertheless I'm afraid you must consider yourself under arrest on a charge of obstructing the police in the execution of their duties."

"As you wish," replied Jim quietly.

The bonds were nearly off when the sound of an aeroplane engine could be heard in the distance.

"Shall we go outside a minute?" suggested Jim. "He's coming over."

"Yes," assented Hunt bitterly. "We might as well see the last of him."

.

Sir Charles Stafford, after leaving the room in which he had so narrowly missed committing another murder, found Jim's motor-cycle propped up outside the hotel.

In less time than it takes to tell he had started it, and was off on his short run to the field in which he had left the 'plane.

Although he knew that he had only seven minutes to spare before the hue and cry for him began, it was characteristic of the man that he did not hurry. He could not be really frightened by anything on earth.

Six minutes had passed before he reached the field and climbed into his 'plane.

The machine was fitted with a self-starter. The

engine woke to life immediately. As his nose was already pointing into the wind, he was able to take off straight away.

Giving his engine plenty of throttle, he taxied rapidly up the field, the mad rush of the wind past his cheeks clearing his aching head.

A few moments later he had left the ground and was racing towards Douglas and the sea.

After his initial rise of a hundred feet or so he kept the controls in a central position, seemingly missing the housetops by a hair's-breadth—a challenge to Hunt, and, did he but know it, a challenge to fate.

Over the harbour he started to rise—200, 300, 400, 500, and soon 2,000 feet. Then, when the watching crowds thought he had taken his spectacular leave of the island, he turned—turned to give a last salute to Jim.

Once again the harbour was far below him; the departing *Mona*, which had just left the quay, appeared but the smallest model.

Then, pushing his stick right forward, he started the steep dive with which he always preceded a loop.

And in the moment he attempted to pull his nose up he knew his fate was sealed. For the stick refused to move; it was stuck—stuck in a position that forced his machine seawards with ever-increasing speed.

Desperately he tried to shut off the engine.—But the throttle was immovable; someone had tampered with the controls—someone had deliberately planned to send him to his doom, as he himself had planned to send Evans.

And in that fraction of a second the malignity of his crimes came home to him—his actions of the past few years passed rapidly in unwholesome review before him.

How he regretted the absence of a parachute—remembered how he had boasted that he never carried one when flying over water, as in a accident it would prove only a hindrance.

But even as that fleeting vision passed he had time to realise that what he might gain on the roundabouts he would only lose on the swings—even a parachute would not save him from Inspector Hunt—and the gallows.

The sea was very close now. Instinct compelled him to attempt to leap. But he had left it too late.

Before he could move, even slightly, the 'plane hit the water—and the last earthly thing he saw before he was plunged for ever beneath the fleck-tipped waves of Douglas Harbour was the hand of his air-speed indicator. And that hand was tightly pressed against the stop by the highest speed indicated on the dial—a speed of 200 miles per hour.

.

Hunt and Jim stood outside the Ceramo, rooted to the pavement, watching a cascade of water, that had been flung skywards by the last death-dealing dive of the 'plane, descend again into the harbour.

For some moments after the last foam-frothed ripple had vanished neither spoke.

It was Jim who broke the silence. "Am I still under arrest?" he asked.

Hunt considered for a moment.

"No," he replied at length, "I think not—but remember," he added smilingly, "I have a full confession recorded on a dictaphone, if I ever want to use it."

He could afford to smile now. His most difficult case was ended—ended, too, in the pleasantest way for all concerned.

"Although you're not under arrest, there's one thing you are—though so far you don't seem to have realised it."

"What's that?" questioned Jim wonderingly.

"Practically a millionaire," was Hunt's reply. "If you ever manage to trace *all* Sir Charles' accounts, you'll probably find yourself *quite* a millionaire."

They started to move back to the hotel; Jim to get washed in readiness for the prize-giving, Hunt to attend to his dictaphone.

In the hall, the Yard man halted. "I must leave you here," he said. "I've just remembered I've a telegram to send." He held out his hand in farewell. "In case I've left by the time you return."

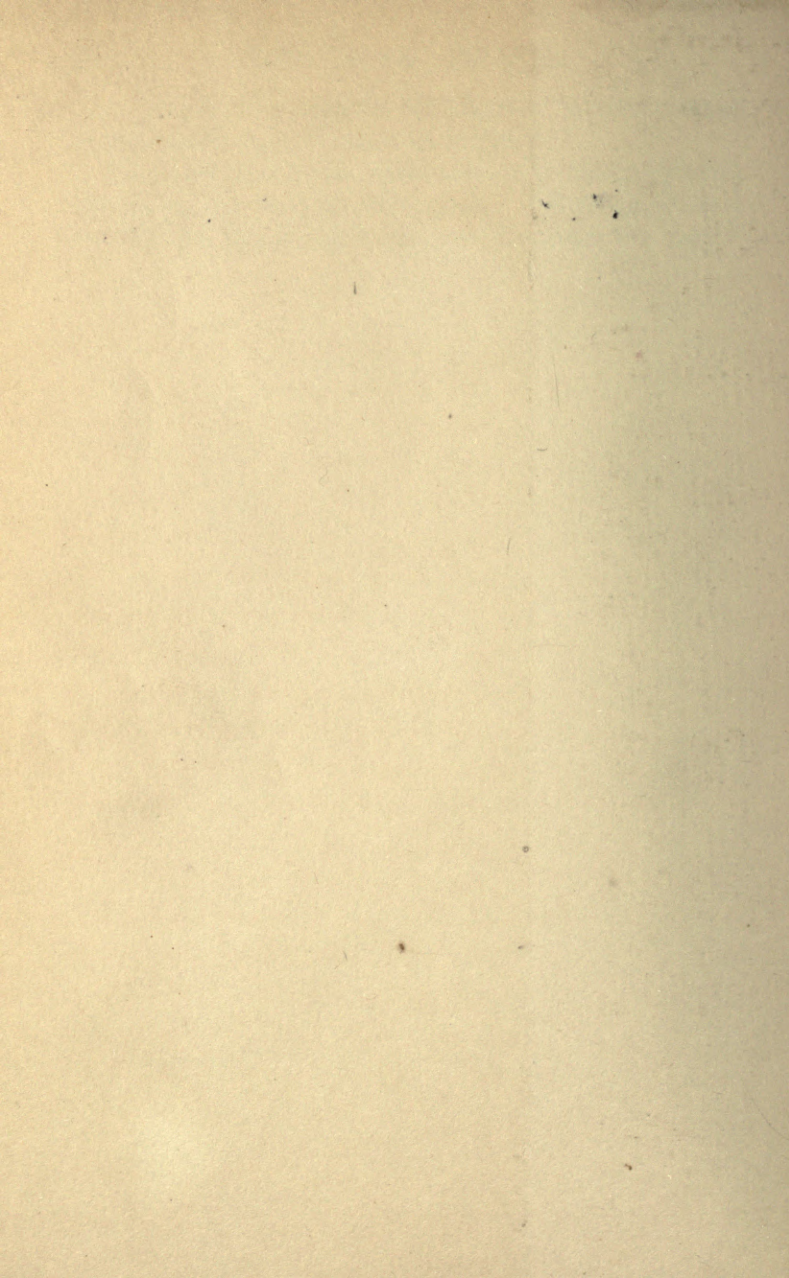
Jim grasped it warmly. "I shall certainly look you up, Inspector, when you get back to Town," he promised.

"Do," replied Hunt with enthusiasm. "I'll show you round the Yard and let you see the dreadful fate of those misguided persons who are stupid enough to obstruct the police in the execution of their duties."

He started to move away. After a couple of paces he stopped, turned, and faced Jim. "You know," he began, "I shall often wonder in the years that are

to come just what caused Sir Charles' 'plane to crash at the psychological moment it did."

He proceeded a few paces nearer to the telephone, then stopped, and turned again. "But somehow I don't think I'm going to let myself wonder *too* hard."



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